

CHARMED BY THE KARKONOSZE MOUNTAINS: PRZEMYSŁAW WIATER (1958–2020)

Bożena Danielska

Karkonosze Museum in Jelenia Góra



There are people whose death is always premature. This is exactly the case of Przemysław Wiater who passed away merely several months after he had begun running the Karkonosze Museum in Jelenia Góra.

Przemysław Wiater PhD was a historian, an art historian, a museum curator, and an outstanding regionalist. Born in Cieplice, he studied at the University of Wrocław, first history, specializing in archiving, which he graduated from in 1983,¹ and then art history (1987).² Having graduated from university, he began working as a researcher for the Team for Technology Historic Monuments at the Faculty of Architecture at the Wrocław University of Science and Technology. He completed his doctoral studies at the School of Silesian Studies at the University of Wrocław in 1994, gaining his PhD in humanities (history).³ In 1994–2020, he worked as a certified curator at the Carl and Gerhart Hauptmann House in Szklarska Poręba, a branch of the Karkonosze Museum in Jelenia Góra.

In 2000–2002, he served as the advisor to the Minister of Culture and National Heritage on the recovery of historic monuments as well as an expert of the Marshal of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship with respect to cultural institutions. As commissioned by the Marshal Office of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship he prepared the *Museums in Lower Silesia* Report.

Simultaneously, in 1996–2004, he chaired the 'History' Working Group of the Nisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion. Apart from representing Szklarska Poręba in the NYSA Euroregion, in 2009–2013, he worked as an expert at the Ministry of Regional Development for the assessment of the Phare CBC III

Poland-Saxony Programme with respect to culture; furthermore, as councillor he served in the Szklarska Poręba Council for several terms of office: 1999–2002, 2002–2006, 2006–2010, 2010–2014, and 2018–2020.

Having launched his cooperation with the Higher School of Management in Legnica in 2008, he worked as lecturer at its Law Faculty, running the following courses: Legal and Organizational and Financial Aspects of the Operation of Cultural Institutions, Copyright and Multi-cultural Character of Lower Silesia. In 2015–2017, he was Dean of the Faculty of Law at the School. From 2008 onwards, he was member of the Programme Council of the International Centre of Law and Management, also heading the 'Questions of Multiculturalism of Lower Silesia in the Context of European Regionalism' Research Team at the International Centre of Law and Management in Legnica. In 2017, he completed postgraduate studies specializing in HR Management.⁴ In March 2020, having won the competition, he became Director of the Karkonosze Museum in Jelenia Góra.

This brief CV demonstrates that Dr Przemysław Wiater's interests focused on two issues: legal aspects of museum operations and history of the region. The director's position he had been preparing himself for all his life was subdued to the idea of verifying the museum's mission in preserving and disseminating the cultural legacy of Lower Silesia, particularly of the Jelenia Góra region.

Since it was regionalism that constituted the backbone of his research. Regionalism understood as extending knowledge of the place you inhabit and as aiming at the region's cultural integration based on the found multicultural heritage of the borderland with superposed cultural contents imported by post- WW II settlers. It is an extremely challenging task in the region populated by communities mixed culturally owing to resettlements and migration movements: the communities which found the base of alien tangible and intangible culture. Additionally, the culture that was for decades destroyed and discredited. Meanwhile, identifying the values of the whole heritage allows to shape social awareness and to use its potential to create new values. Such an approach teaches tolerance and understanding, it gives the sense of re-rooting. This serves as the grounds for the creation and development of local identity, emphasizing cultural properties of the region, its traditions and heritage, as well as cultural distinctness. The attachment to regional homeland usually translates into engagement of its inhabitants, emotionally and formally aiming at boosting its cultural autonomy, this usually yielding inspiration to the region's development. At the same time, regionalism in a way responds to the nostalgia for a *heimat*, which stems from a reaction to globalism, unification, cultural chaos, and relativism.

It was this very idea that inspired the long-standing research and popularizing activity of Przemysław Wiater. He authored dozens of publications addressing the history of the Karkonosze and Iżera Mountains. In his groundbreaking monographs he presented the history and the unique aura of the region: the history of Szklarska Poręba,⁵ Walloon mineral and gem prospectors,⁶ old herbalists and laborants,⁷ history of glassworks,⁸ painters from St Luke's Artists' Association in Szklarska Poręba,⁹ or the figure and legend of the Spirit of the Mountains personifying the region's *genius loci*. What has remained unfinished is his publication dealing with the

development of winter sports in the Karkonosze Mountains, though on regional portals many of his articles on the topic can be found. Publishing in Polish, Czech, and German, he co-authored the translation from German of Carl Hauptmann's *Book of the Spirit of the Mountains*¹⁰ and *Gerhart Hauptmann and His Houses*,¹¹ as well as of poems by Carl and Gerhart Hauptmann.

He was the first to undertake research into tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Szklarska Poręba, the Karkonosze and the Iżera Mountains. Having discovered the phenomenon of art colonies, characteristic of the period from the second half of the 19th century to the 1930s, he popularized it and transferred to the present day reality. In 1998, he presented the 'Here' Exhibition; mounted in the Carl and Gerhart Hauptmann House in Szklarska Poręba,¹² it dealt with the town's contemporary artistic circles. Wiater instilled in his contemporaries the need to understand historical heritage and the urge to continue it.

An important element in Wiater's career was the fact that he initiated and ran, as head of the Polish party (1997–2000), the Polish-German Project: *Wonderful Landscape. Imposante Landschaft. Artists and Art Colonies in the Karkonosze Mountains in the 20th Century*.¹³ The result of those activities involving many Polish and German cultural institutions was the exhibition travelling through many towns of Lower Silesia and Germany as well as a publication bearing the same title, to-date being a compendium of knowledge on the phenomenon of artists' colonies in Szklarska Poręba, placing it within the category of similar phenomena in Europe at the turn of the 20th century and at present.

In 2005, at the instigation of Przemysław Wiater an interdisciplinary New Mill Association. Art Colony bringing together artists, writers and culture animators as well as regionalists, popularizing culture of the region, its contemporary art, and promoting development of cultural tourism, was founded. That very year its cooperation with the well-known Polish art colony in Kazimierz Dolny was established. The New Mill Association. Art Colony and the Kazimierz Brotherhood of Arts cooperated already in 2006, as a result yielding exchange of experience and of exhibitions.¹⁴

Przemysław Wiater's cooperation with German scholars dealing with history of art colonies led to incorporating Szklarska Poręba, with the town's authorities' approval, into 'euroArt', a European Federation of Artists' Colonies. As a result, artists from the Karkonosze and Iżera Mountains participated in the international art exhibition in Belgian's Tervuren.¹⁵ In 2013, in partnership with Berlin's Fraenger Institut, the Vistula Region Museum in Kazimierz, and Zakopane's Tatra Museum, a major project promoting Polish art colonies was presented at Worspwede, the most prominent European colony sustaining the 19th- and 20th-century trend of alternative culture. It was *Kunst- und Filmbiennale Worspwede 2013 / 2013 Worspwede Festival of Art and Film*,¹⁶ coordinated by Przemysław Wiater on the Polish side. The Festival included Polish films thematically connected with the art of artists' colonies, shows and panel discussions, as well as a display of historical art and of contemporary pieces executed by the artistic circles from Kazimierz Dolny, Szklarska Poręba, and Zakopane.

On 11–14 September 2014, Kazimierz Dolny hosted EFKA, the European Festival of Art Colonies. Next to the hosts,



2. Taking part in a retro skiing competition, 2014

the Festival was participated by representatives of Szklarska Poręba, Zakopane, Worpsswede, and Kremets. Apart from New Mill artists, the Karkonosze colony was represented by the Puppet Clinic Theatre from Wolimierz performing at the Kazimierz Dolny market square. The Festival had been preceded by the authorities of both towns signing an agreement on cultural cooperation on 8 May 2014, the move initiated by Przemysław Wiater.

The last activity of Przemysław Wiater in this field was the address he made at the annual international meeting of the Federation of Artists' Colonies in Kazimierz Dolny in 2019; he presented the initiative to submit the proposal of making 2022 the year of art colonies to the European Parliament. Regrettably, the COVID pandemic jeopardized these plans.

Having assumed his Director's position at the Karkonosze Museum in Jelenia Góra on 17 March 2020, Przemysław Wiater held it until 17 November 2020: all throughout the COVID pandemic. He mounted an extensive display programme of academic and educational character, popularizing the results of research into the history and heritage of the region. The core of it was to be epitomized in exhibitions of the 'In the Shadow of the Giant Mountains' series,¹⁷ the first element of which: the interdisciplinary Exhibition 'The Middle Ages. In the Shadow of the Giant Mountains', has been planned for November 2021; it will be accompanied by seminars and numerous talks, museum classes, and workshops.

In the context of the mission of the museum conceived as the centre of regionalism and coordinator of the activity of institutions and associations, important actions of Przemysław Wiater encompassed his efforts to reintroduce knowledge

of the region into schools' and universities' curriculum. At least here, in Lower Silesia, namely within the Jelenia Góra Voivodeship, the region boasting landscapes of exceptional beauty and extremely rich in cultural goods. He devoted all his life to working for residents to be proud of where they live, to appreciate the uniqueness of their *heimat*, to identify with it, and for them to acknowledge their historical heritage as part of their own identity. A challenging task, to say the least, and maybe even mission impossible in this world chasing unification, however, this was exactly Przemysław's nature: he loved tilting at windmills. And as it turns out, his tough battle was effective.

He could talk for hours on end on the town at the foot of Szrenica and on its obliterated history. He would share his knowledge in a popular form, as fiction adventure stories, and he infected others with his passion, particularly young people whom he provided with his support and inspiration. And now, resorting to this backbone those young people spread knowledge of the region with theatre, artistic and literary activities, cultural tourist trails, or actions on the borderline between history and art.

Thanks to his charisma and academic endeavours, however, also thanks to the state administration creating a respective legal and financial framework, a widespread regional social movement represented by associations and societies active in the realm of broadly conceived culture has been developing. Przemysław Wiater initiated the foundation of the W. E. Peuckert Guild of the Sudety Mountains Guides and became its honorary member; furthermore, he was member of the Chapter of the Sudety Mountains Walloon Brotherhood, and cooperated with the Izera Mountains Society, serving also as a knight of the informal Society of the Evening Castle. Originator of the Izery Retro Run and the Flannel Rally, he initiated several tourist trails, e.g., he marked



3. Promotion of the book *Charmed by the Karkonosze Mountains*, Carl and Gerhart Hauptmann House, Szklarska Poręba, July 2020

out the cycling 'artistic trail' No. 13, while in 2009, the 'Juliusz Naumowicz Walloon Trails', having also co-authored the 'W. E. Peuckert Trail' under preparation and the Polish-Czech 'Laborants' Trail'.

He was appreciated for all his accomplishments by society, but also by the authorities, having received the '2003 Izery Crystal' for his activity in culture. In 2010, he was awarded a special prize by the Marshal of Lower Silesian Voivodeship for particular accomplishments in culture, while in 2012, the Woodwose Prize of the Jelenia Góra Starost, following which came the 'Gloria Artis' Medal in 2014, and the Bronze Cross of Merit two years later. In 2017, he was

honoured with the title of the 'Citizen of Merit to Szklarska Poręba'. What is more, Wiater also received the Władysław Krygowski Literary Prize for his book *Laborants Visiting the Mountain Spirit* in 2019. Currently, the residents and authorities of Szklarska Poręba are deciding which part of the town is going to bear the name of Przemysław Wiater.

The man who passed away on 17 November 2020 had always been cheerful, friendly, helpful. An invaluable expert in and promoter of the region, he was, first of all, a Friend who left behind beautiful memories, friendly conversations, and knowledge he had always so joyfully shared with others.

Abstract: Przemysław Wiater PhD was a historian, art historian, museum curator, and a regionalist. In 1994–2020, he worked as a certified curator at the Carl and Gerhart Hauptmann House in Szklarska Poręba. In February 2020, he became Director of the Karkonosze Museum in Jelenia Góra. Furthermore, in 2008–2017, he ran courses at the Higher School of Management in Legnica. Committed to recovering historic monuments from Lower Silesia, he also served as a councillor for several terms of office in Szklarska Poręba, where he lived.

An outstanding regionalist, Wiater focused on investigating the history of Lower Silesia, particularly the Karkonosze and Izera Mountains. He was the first to undertake research into the local tangible and non-tangible cultural heritage, popularizing it in publications describing the history of Szklarska Poręba, Walloon mineral and gem prospectors, old herbalists and laborants, history of glassworks, or the figure and legend of the Spirit of the

Mountains. Having discovered the phenomenon of artistic colonies, he popularized it and adapted to harmonize with contemporary times.

His idea was to culturally integrate the region basing on historical cultural contents and the heritage imported by post-WW II settlers. Sharing his knowledge in a popular way, he infected others with his passion, particularly young people to whom he provided support and inspiration. It was at his instigation that the W.E. Peuckert Guild of the Sudety Mountains Guides was formed; member of the Chapter of the Sudety Mountains Walloon Brotherhood, he was also the knight of the informal Society of the Evening Castle, additionally cooperating with the Izery Society. Originator of the Izery Retro Run and the Flannel Rally, he inspired the formation of several tourist routes, such as the 'Juliusz Naumonowicz Walloon Hiking Trail', contributing to the creation of the 'W.E. Peuckert Trail' and the Polish-Czech 'Laborants' Trail'.

Keywords: Przemysław Wiater (1958–2020), culture, region, the Karkonosze Mountains, the Izera Mountains, art, museum, Szklarska Poręba, artistic colonies.

Endnotes

- ¹ MA thesis, *Małopolska reprezentacja parlamentarna za czasów Jana Kazimierza (1648-1668)* [Parliamentary Representation under John Casimir (1648-1668)], under Stefania Ochman-Staniszevska post-doctoral degree, University of Wrocław, Institute of History, 1983.
- ² MA thesis, *Portrety Stanisława i Antoniego Kamieńskich z Muzeum Narodowego we Wrocławiu* [Portraits of Stanisław and Antoni Kamieński at the National Museum in Wrocław], under Prof. Mięczyśław Zlat, University of Wrocław, Department of Art History, 1987.
- ³ Doctoral dissertation: *Historia wrocławskiej komunikacji tramwajowej do 1945 r.* [History of Wrocław Tramway Transportation by 1945], under Prof. A. Galos, University of Wrocław, School of Silesian Studies], 1995.
- ⁴ Diploma thesis, *Organizacyjne aspekty zarządzania muzeami Dolnego Śląska w kontekście efektywności działań marketingowych i oczekiwań społecznych* [Organizational Aspects of Managing Museums in Lower Silesia in the Context of Marketing Actions' Effectiveness and Social Expectations], 2017.
- ⁵ I. Łaborewicz, P. Wiater, *Szklarska Poręba. Monografia historyczna* [Szklarska Poręba. Historical Monograph], Jelenia Góra 2010; P. Wiater: *Osada Szklarska Poręba-Orle w Górach Izerskich* [The Szklarska Poręba-Orle Settlement in the Izera Mountains], Warszawa 2012; *Kolonia artystyczna w Szklarskiej Porębie* [Artists' Colony in Szklarska Poręba], in: *Wokół niemieckiego dziedzictwa kulturowego na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych* [on German Cultural Heritage in Western and Northern Territories], Z. Mazur (ed.), Poznań 1997, pp. 127-149; *Zabytkowy cmentarz ewangelicki w Szklarskiej Porębie Dolnej* [Historic Evangelical Cemetery in Lower Szklarska Poręba], 'Rocznik Jeleniogórski' 1998, Vol. XXX, pp. 147-155; *Pisarska Poręba nad Szklarskim Potokiem. O początkach Szklarskiej Poręby* [Writing Clearing (Poręba) on the Glass (Szklarski) Stream. On the Beginnings of Szklarska Poręba], 'Rocznik Jeleniogórski' 2012, Vol. XLIV, pp. 33-48.
- ⁶ Idem, *Walonowie u Ducha Gór. Podziemne skarby Karkonoszy i Gór Izerskich* [Walloons Visiting the Spirit of the Mountains. Underground Treasures of the Karkonosze and Izera Mountains], Jelenia Góra 2010; 2nd Edition extended and completed, Jelenia Góra 2018.
- ⁷ Idem, *Laboranci u Ducha Gór. Dawne ziołolecznictwo w Karkonoszach i Górach Izerskich* [Laborants Visiting the Spirit of the Mountains. Old Herbal Medicine in the Karkonosze and Izera Mountains], Jelenia Góra 2017; *Laboranci w Karkonoszach i Górach Izerskich* [Laborants in the Karkonosze and Izera Mountains], 'Rocznik Jeleniogórski' 2007, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 61-77; *Laboranti*, in: *Krkonosze – příroda, historie, život*, J. Flousek., J. Hartmanova-Stursa, J. Potocki (ed.), Praha 2008, pp. 501-503; *Karkonoscy laboranci. O dziejach prawno-administracyjnej eliminacji dawnego śląskiego rzemiosła* [The Karkonosze Laborants.

- On the Legal-Administrative Eradication of the Old Silesian Craft] in: *Księga jubileuszowa z okazji 5-lecia Wydziału Prawa Wyższej Szkoły Menedżerskiej w Legnicy* [Jubilee Book on the Five Years of the Faculty of Law at the High School of Management in Legnica], N. Szczęch (ed.), Legnica 2010, pp. 469-479.
- ⁸ Idem, *Początki hutnictwa szkła w dolinie rzeki Kamiennej* [Beginnings of Glass-making in the Kamienna River Valley], 'Rocznik Jeleniogórski' 1999, Vol. XXXI, pp. 105-115; *Dawna huta szkła Karlstal – Orle. Zarys dziejów* [The Old Karlstal-Orle Glassworks. History Outline], 'Rocznik Jeleniogórski' 2000, Vol. XXXII, pp. 65-85; *Witriolejnia i kopalnie pirytu w Szklarskiej Porębie Dolnej* [Vitriol Manufactory and Pyrite Mine in Lower Szklarska Poręba], 'Rocznik Jeleniogórski' 2009, Vol. XLI, pp. 43-49; *Vitriolova huť a pyritové doly ve Sklářské Porebě Dolní*, in: 'Ročenka Jizersko-ještědského horského spolku' 2009, pp. 33-38.
- ⁹ Idem, *Zauroczeni Karkonoszami* [Charmed by the Karkonosze Mountains], Jelenia Góra 2020.
- ¹⁰ C. Hauptmann, *Księga Ducha Gór* [Book of the Spirit of the Mountains], 1st Edition, Jelenia Góra 2008; 2nd Edition, Jelenia Góra 2014, P. Wiater, E. Mendyk (trans. of both editions).
- ¹¹ W. de Bruyn, A. Johanning, *Gerhart Hauptmann i jego domy. Hiddensee – Erkner – Szklarska Poręba – Jagniątków* [Gerhart Hauptmann and His Houses. Hiddensee – Erkner – Szklarska Poręba – Jagniątków], P. Wiater, T. Pryll (trans.), Berlin 2007.
- ¹² „TUTAJ. Dzisiejsza kolonia artystów w Szklarskiej Porębie” [‘HERE. Today’s Artists’ Colony in Szklarska Poręba], Dec 1997–Feb 1998, Carl and Gerhart Hauptmann House in Szklarska Poręba.
- ¹³ ‘Wspaniały krajobraz. Artyści i kolonie artystyczne w Karkonoszach w XX wieku’ [‘Wonderful Landscape. Artists and Art Colonies in the Karkonosze Mountains in the 20th Century’], May–Aug 1999 District Museum in Jelenia Góra; Sep–Oct 1999 Historical Museum in Wrocław [Town Hall]; Oct 1999–Jan 2000 Museum Kreuzberg Berlin; Feb–May 2000 Oberschlesisches Museum Ratingen; May–July 2000 Museum Alfeld; Aug–Oct 2000 Schlesisches Museum Görlitz; Oct–Dec 2000 Rathaus Bad Harzburg.
- ¹⁴ ‘Kazimierskie impresje’ [‘Kazimierz Impressions’], exhibition of artists from the Kazimierz Brotherhood of Arts in Szklarska Poręba and ‘Art Fair’ as an accompanying event 29 July–30 Sept 2006 and two exhibitions from Szklarska Poręba in Kazimierz: ‘St Luke’s Association of Artists from Schreiberhau’ and ‘New Mill Artists’ Association in Szklarska Poręba’, Kazimierz on the Vistula 2006.
- ¹⁵ ‘Water in de kunst / Woda w sztuce’ [‘Water in Art’]: exhibition of the works of artists associated in the ‘euroART’ European Federation of Artists’ Colonies, 29 April 2011–9 June 2011.
- ¹⁶ *Kunst- und Filmbiennale Worpsswede 2013. Zwischen den Polen / Między Biegunami. Biennale Sztuki i Filmu Worpsswede 2013* [Between the Poles. 2013 Worpsswede Biennial of Art and Film], 26 April–29 April 2013.
- ¹⁷ The traditional name of the Karkonosze Mountains until 1946; also Polish: *Karkonosze*; Czech: *Krkonoše*; Silesian-German: *Riesageberge*; German: *Riesengebirge*; English: *Giant Mountains*.

Bożena Danielska

An art historian, museum curator, culture animator; (2004–2019) Manager of the Carl and Gerhart Hauptmann House in Szklarska Poręba, currently the acting Director of the Karkonosze Museum in Jelenia Góra. President of the New Mill. Art Colony Association; e-mail: bozena.danielska@wp.pl

Word count: 2 245; **Tables:** –; **Figures:** 3; **References:** 17

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

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.8840

Copyright ©: Some rights reserved: National Institute for Museums and Public Collections. Published by Index Copernicus Sp. z o.o.



This material is available under the Creative Commons – Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). The full terms of this license are available on: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

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

Cite this article as: CHARMED BY THE KARKONOSZE MOUNTAINS: PRZEMYSŁAW WIATER (1958–2020). *Muz.*, 2021(62): 68-72

Table of contents 2021: <https://muzealnictworocznik.com/issue/13664>