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# POLAND

## Culture and Art

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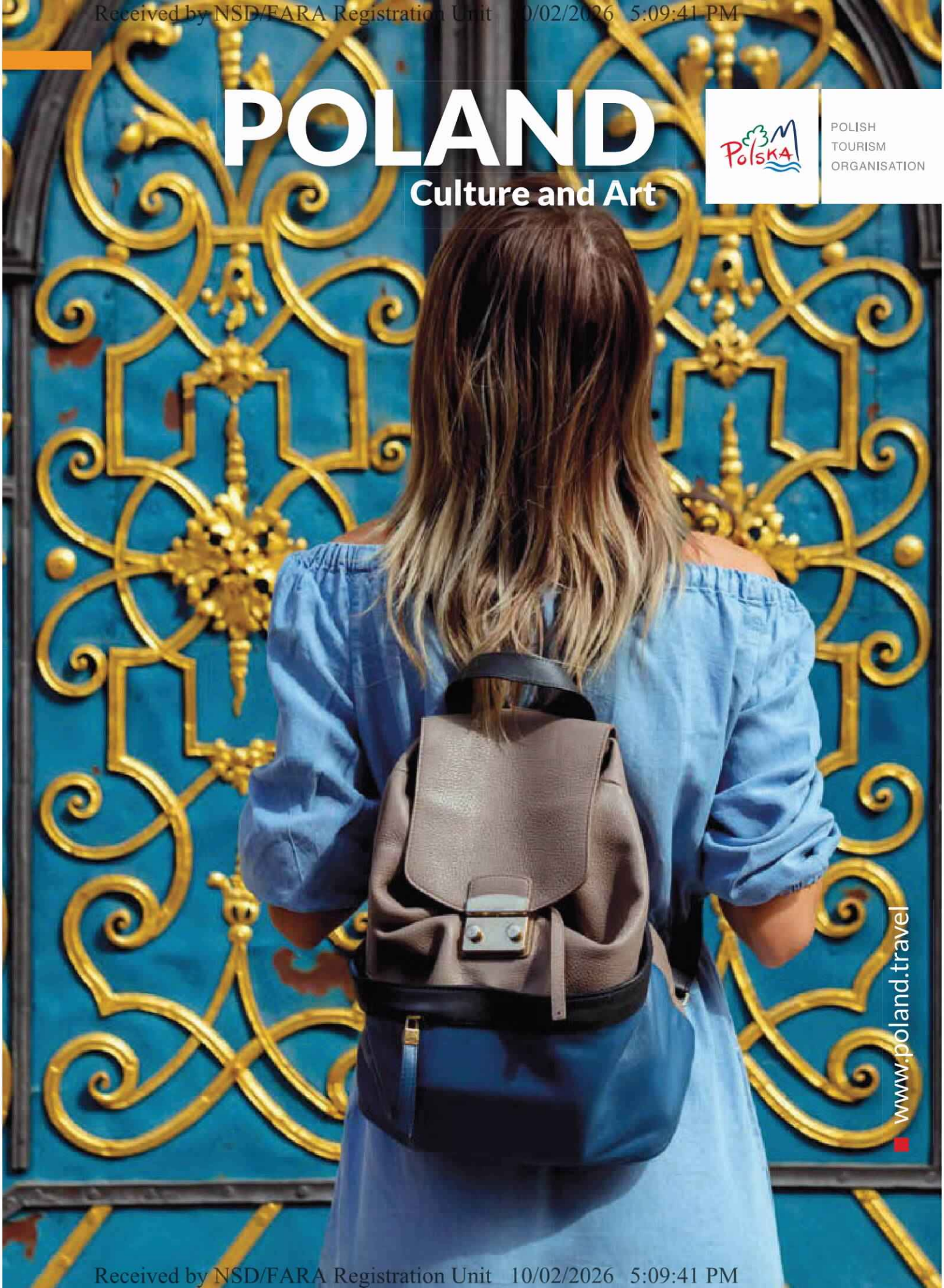

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# Culture and Art

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# Contents


| | |
|---|---|
| Culture | 5 |
| Nicolaus Copernicus | 9 |
| Maria Skłodowska-Curie | 10 |
| Fryderyk Chopin | 13 |
| International Chopin Piano Competition | 14 |
| Classical music festivals | 19 |
| Jazz festivals | 20 |
| Theatre and opera | 22 |
| Polish dance | 25 |
| Reconstructions of past events | 26 |
| Museums | 30 |
| Jan Matejko | 34 |
| Other famous artists | 36 |
| Murals | 40 |
| Architecture | 43 |
| Folklore and folk costumes | 46 |
| Traditional holidays | 50 |
| Discovering Polish cuisine | 53 |
| Amber | 59 |
| Ceramics | 60 |
| Glass | 63 |


Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 10/02/2026 5:09:41 PM

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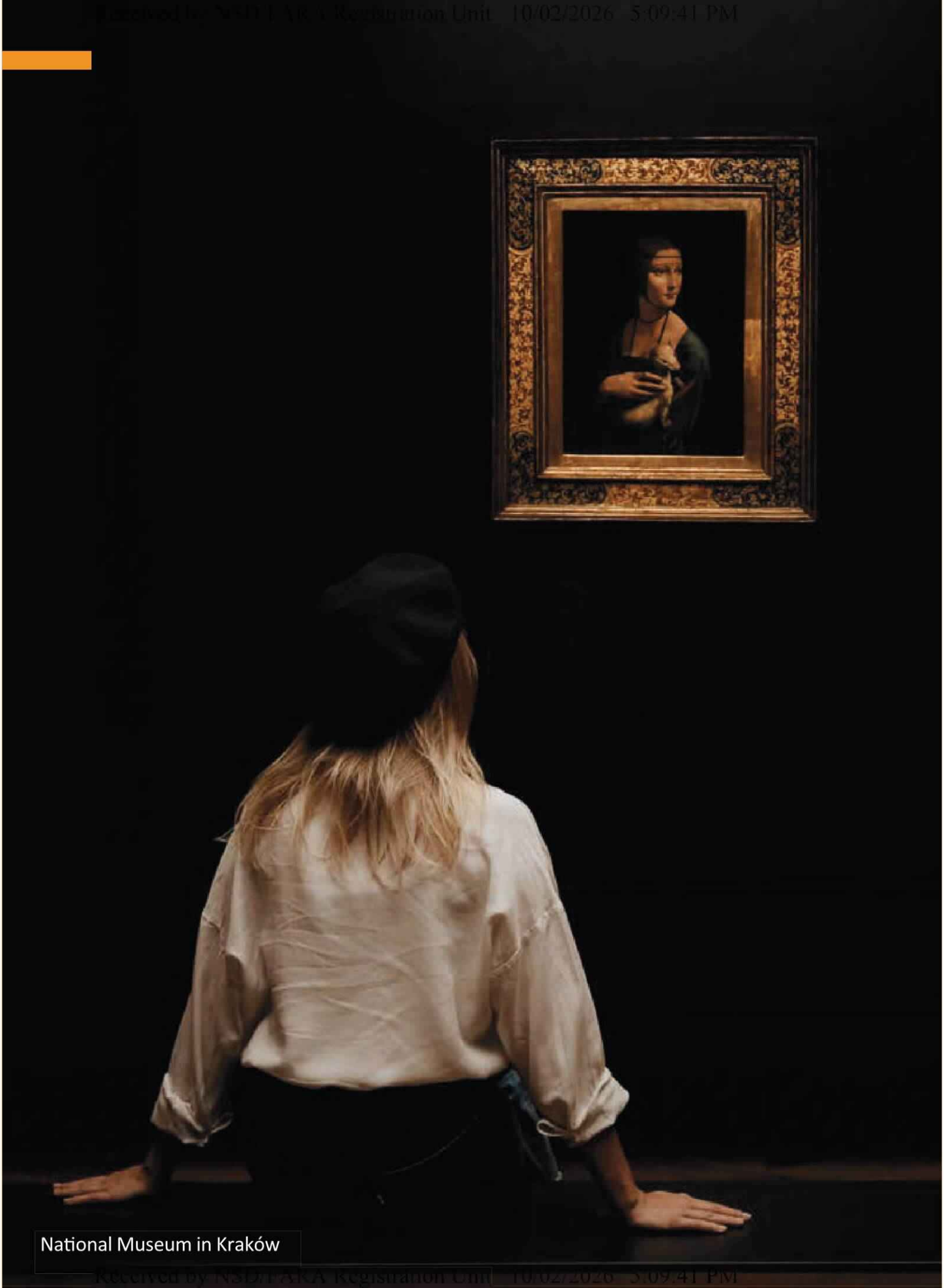


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# Culture
## is always a good idea

There are many reasons to visit Poland. These may include the numerous attractions, the historic monuments, the natural assets and even family ties, but it cannot be denied that rich culture can also be an important aspect that draws visitors

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Music, art and crafts are examples of tangible cultural heritage. As you can expect from the birthplace of Chopin, Poland is a country where music is highly appreciated, and travellers can experience it in many ways and in many places – historic interiors, modern buildings and open-air concerts. You can clearly hear folk inspirations in Fryderyk Chopin's works, while Krzysztof Penderecki and Witold Lutosławski successfully took contemporary music in avant-garde directions on a global scale. Polish jazz has for many years extolled the name of Poland abroad. One of the better ways to explore the culture of any country is to spend a moment or two in some of the many museums and galleries. Among Polish artists there are many internationally recognised names. The ambassadors of Polish sculpture include Igor Mitoraj and Magdalena Abakanowicz. Their works are universally admired. Paintings by Roman Opałka and Wilhelm Sasnal are highly sought after and often become part of exquisite collections. Polish design also deserves particular attention. Drawing from the past, young creators cross borders and set trends.

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When it comes to the Polish recipients of the Nobel Prize, the field of literature comes to the fore. The first Pole to be recognised that way was Henryk Sienkiewicz, who received the prize in 1905, followed by Władysław Reymont and Czesław Miłosz, and in recent years also Wisława Szymborska and Olga Tokarczuk. Avid readers are sure to know the names of Stanisław Lem, Sławomir Mrożek and Józef Korzeniowski, with the latter winning international fame under the pseudonym Joseph Conrad. Fans of *The Witcher* will also be very familiar with the name of yet another Polish writer, Andrzej Sapkowski.

## Giants of science

Poland is the homeland of many figures of global historic influence. Almost everyone will remember from school the name of our extraordinary scientist Marie Curie, but it is worth knowing that there were other Poles who have changed the world through their inventions, even though their names may not necessarily be as well-known.

The world's first crude oil "mine" was actually established in Bóbrka, in the south of Poland, by Ignacy Łukasiewicz. As the inventor of the kerosene lamp, he kicked off a real revolution in the world in the mid-19th century, making the lives of thousands of people easier. Only a few months after the invention, a surgical operation was performed using its light. In turn, an invention by Jan Czochralski was the foundation for the development of contemporary electronics. He devised a method of creating single crystals, without which we would not have smartphones, laptops, tablets or digital cameras.

Another invention – quite an unusual one – is Esperanto. This international language was the brainchild of Ludwik Zamenhof, who thought that most of the unnecessary misunderstandings between people were caused by language barriers. The first Esperanto coursebook, entitled *International Language*, was published in 1887. Esperanto was a language that was equally "foreign" for everyone, but still quite easy to learn, so it quickly won a lot of enthusiasts. Today, Esperanto is used by around two million people worldwide, and Zamenhof's home town of Białystok organises Esperanto congresses.

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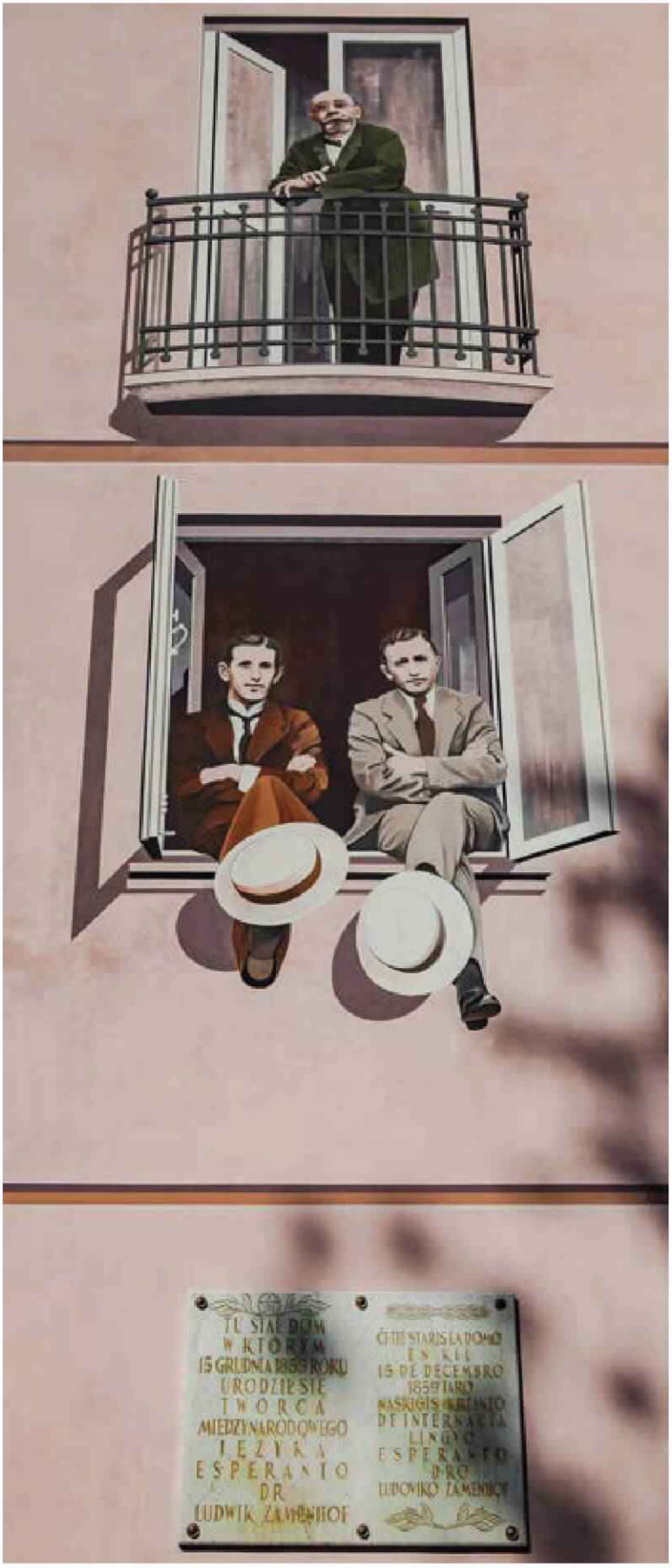

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# Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543)

Clergyman and astronomer - the man who stopped the Sun and moved the Earth

Until the 16th century, astronomy was governed by the geocentric theory, according to which the Sun and planets circulate around the Earth. The heliocentric model of the Solar System, developed by Nicolaus Copernicus, removed our planet from its privileged spot in the middle of the universe. For half a century, the astronomer watched the sky and the movement of the planets before he decided to make his observations public in his groundbreaking work called *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium*. Although the first heliocentric theory had appeared back in ancient Greece, it was the work of Copernicus that caused a shift in the worldview of the era. The Catholic Church considered its contents to be heretical and the book remained on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* until 1828. The theories put forward by Copernicus revolutionised the way we look at the place of the Earth and man in the universe. They also became the basis for the development of science.

While in Poland, it is worth visiting a few places connected with Copernicus – especially since these are beautiful historic cities. The most important are Toruń, where he was born, and Frombork, where he died and was buried.

**Copernicus was also involved in mathematics, medicine and law. A canon priest and economist, he wrote poems, translated poetry from Greek into Latin, and made maps. He also worked on a calendar reform.**

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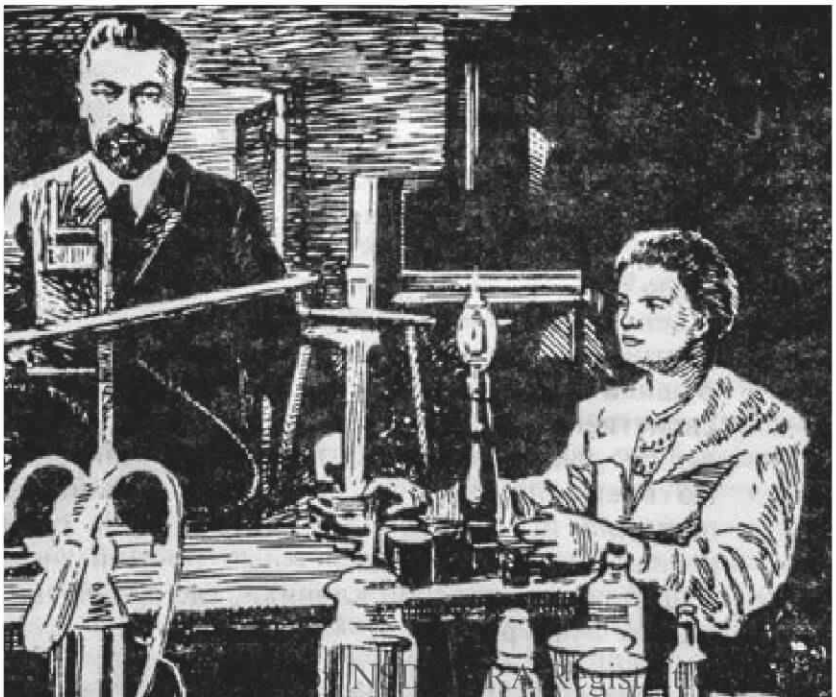
# Maria Skłodowska-Curie
## (1867-1934)

She was one of the most outstanding scientists of all time, and the only person to ever win two Nobel prizes in two different fields of science

Maria Skłodowska-Curie, known internationally as Marie Curie, was born in Warsaw. In 1891, she left for Paris, where she began studying physics and mathematics at the Sorbonne. In 1895, she married Pierre Curie, a physicist with whom she conducted research into the radioactivity of uranium ores in the laboratory of Henri Becquerel. Together with her husband, she discovered two chemical elements, which she named polonium (after her homeland) and radium. She was also able to explain the cause of their radiation as the breakdown of atomic nuclei. For this discovery, the Curies (together with Becquerel) received the Nobel Prize in physics in 1903. In 1911, the research work of Skłodowska-Curie was once again recognised. This time, she received the Nobel Prize in chemistry for isolating pure radium and for her research into radioactive elements.



**She was the first woman to study physics and mathematics at the Sorbonne, the first woman in the world with a PhD in physics, and the first woman to be buried in the Panthéon in Paris.**

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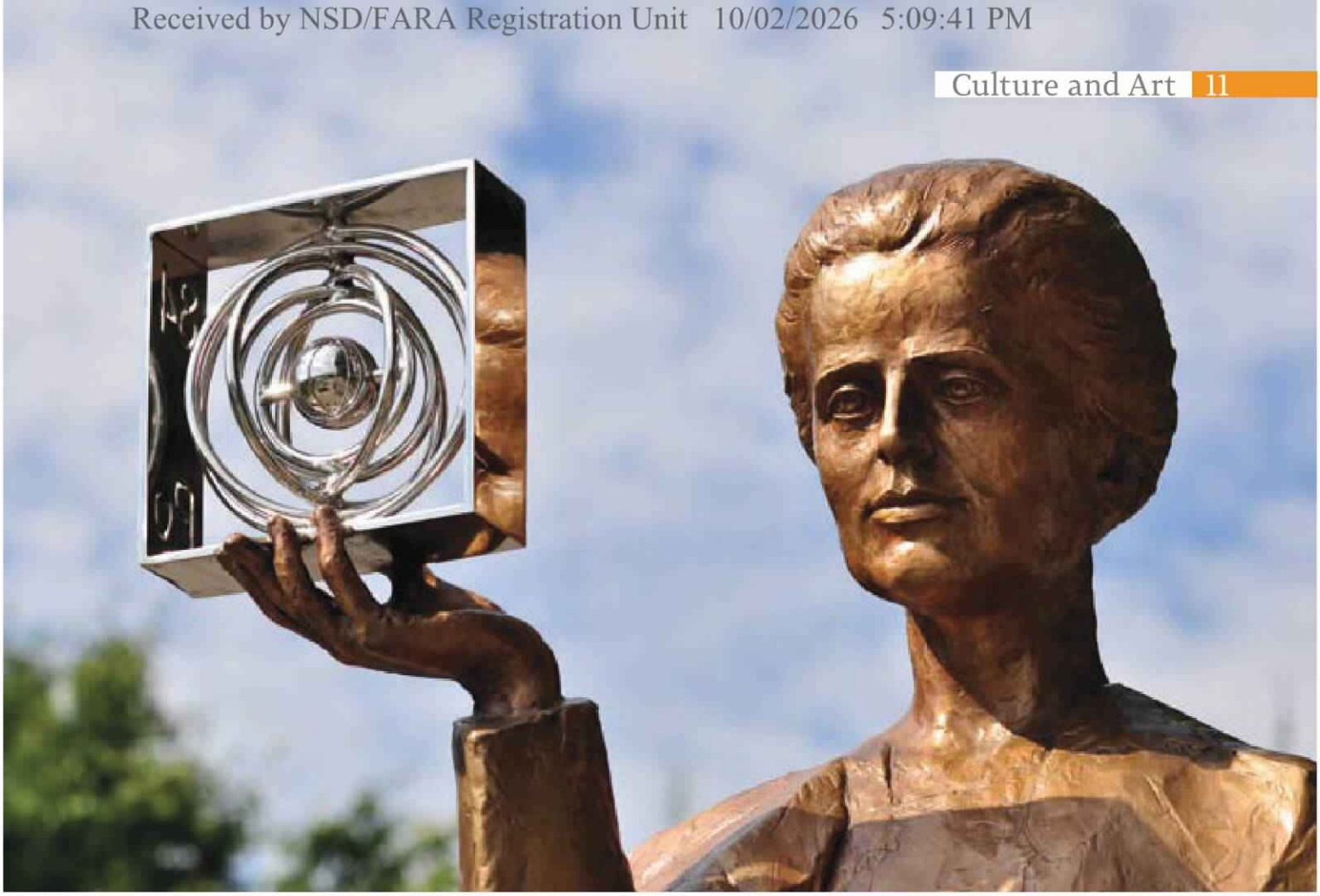

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# Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

One of the greatest composers in history and one of the most famous pianists of his time. Dubbed the "poet of the piano", he had an enormous influence on the history of music

The composer could make the piano sound like no-one had ever made it sound before, with unusual expression and colour, which was later used by Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Debussy, among others. Chopin composed his first piece – *Polonaise in B-flat major* – aged just seven, giving his first public concert in Warsaw a year later. In 1829, his playing won the hearts of audiences in Vienna. Although most of his adult life was spent in emigration (mainly in Paris), he never ceased to be a Pole, which can clearly be heard in his works. He drew on the stylistic patterns of Polish folk music (especially in mazurkas and polonaises) and alluded to events at home, as in the *Revolutionary Etude*. In all, he created over 200 compositions, with the most well-known being: P*relude in D flat major op. 28, Polonaise in A major op. 40* and *Etude in C minor op. 10.*

**Warsaw's Fryderyk Chopin Museum, which is one of the most modern biographical institutions in the world, has many unique memorabilia linked to the artist's life and work.**

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# International Chopin Piano Competition

Also known as the Chopin Competition, it takes place in Warsaw every five years

Held since 1927, this is one of the oldest and most prestigious music competitions in the world. It is also one of the few contests devoted entirely to the works of a single composer. The contenders are pianists between the ages of 17 and 28, and their performances are judged by an eminent international jury composed of the world's most outstanding pianists. The competition is broadcast online and regularly commented on in the press and also on radio and television. Each edition of the competition attracts much more media coverage than other artistic events, often becoming headline news. What is telling about the quality of the competition is how many of its winners have successfully embarked on international careers. These include such names as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Fou Ts'Ong, Martha Argerich, Maurizio Pollini, Krystian Zimerman, Garrick Ohlsson, Stanislav Bunin, Yundi Li and Rafał Blechacz.

## All of Poland is alive with the sounds of Chopin's music

One of the most important places related to the composer is without doubt Duszniki Zdrój in the Kłodzko Valley. Chopin came here in his youth as he was of poor health and the town was, and still is, a well-known health resort. A world-renowned Chopin Festival takes place in Duszniki Zdrój.

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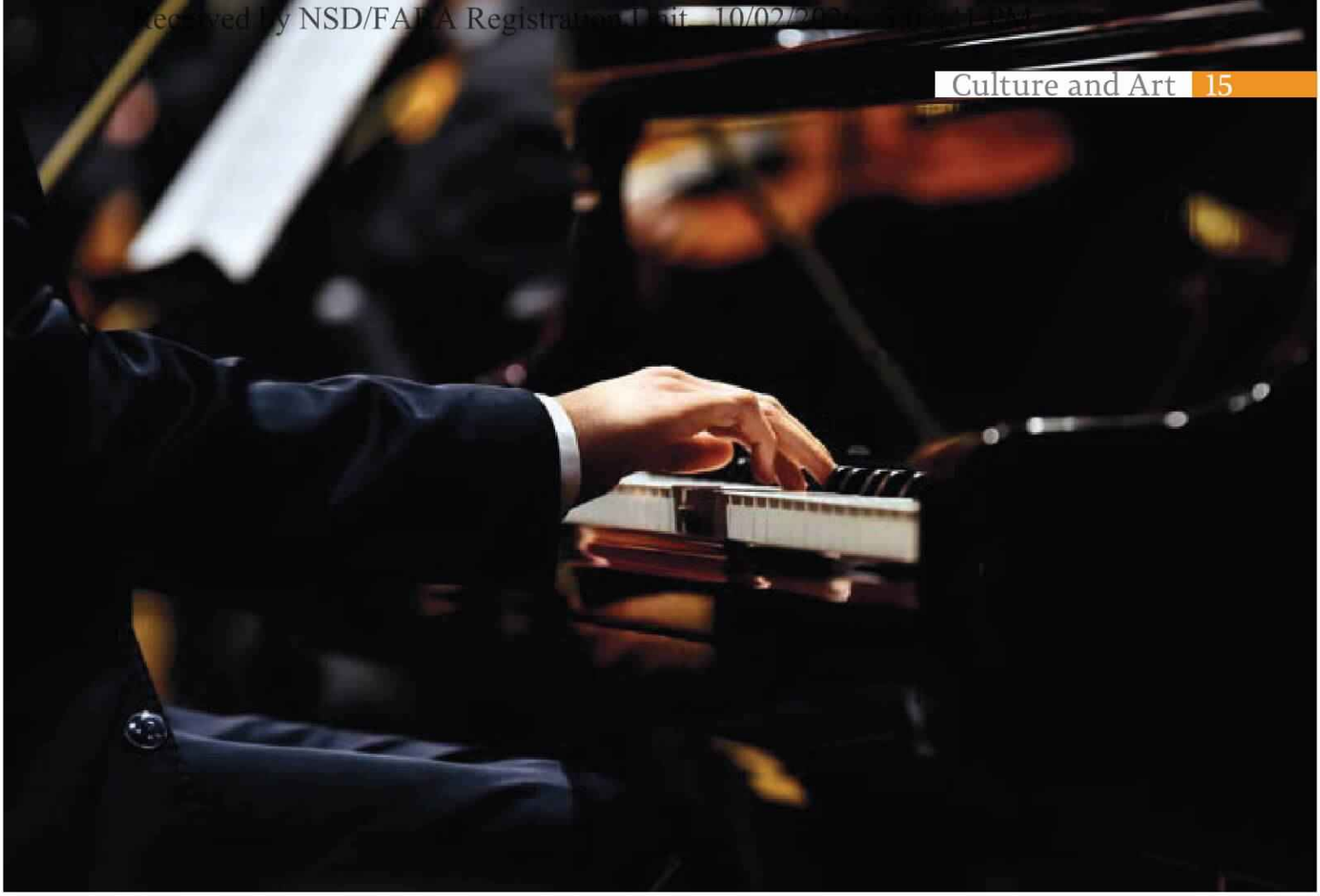

Duszniki Zdrój

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Fryderyk Chopin lived in Warsaw for 20 years, which was half his life. It was here that he completed his music education, gave his first concerts and composed his first works. There are many places associated with him in the Polish capital. The monument to the composer in the Royal Łazienki Park is one of the symbols of the city. For over half a century, piano concerts have been held at the foot of the monument every summer weekend.

More than five thousand exhibits are kept at the Fryderyk Chopin Museum, making it the largest collection of Chopin memorabilia in the world. It includes autographs and first editions, Chopin's correspondence and numerous artefacts. Visitors particularly enjoy Chopin's handwritten notes and drawings in calendars from the 1830s. Some autographs from the collection of the Warsaw museum were included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme in 1999.

Other Chopin-themed places in Warsaw have multimedia benches located on pavements outside, allowing visitors to learn more about the composer's work and his life story. Just touch the button to hear a track.

Despite missing his homeland tremendously, Chopin lived in Paris until his untimely death. He died at the age of 39 and is buried at the Père Lachaise cemetery. However, his heart returned to Warsaw, literally. Following the composer's wish, his sister Ludwika brought it home, where it was laid to rest in the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw.

## Fryderyk Chopin is not just a Warsaw hero

There are many sites associated with Chopin in Mazovia, together forming the Chopin Route. Apart from the manor house in Żelazowa Wola, the fortified church in Brochów where the pianist was baptised and the palace in Sanniki are also interesting places to visit.

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# Classical music festivals

The calendar of festival events taking place throughout the year in Poland creates a rich tapestry in which various musical topics intertwine

The festival selection should satisfy every music aficionado. Without fail, the organisers ensure the presence of excellent virtuoso musicians at their events, as well as a unique atmosphere and character. Fans of classical music love the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music, which focuses on the latest, experimental trends in classical music, including audio art and sound installations. Concerts are held not only in concert halls, but also in former factory buildings, clubs and even sports halls. The Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival is another world-renowned event.

**Lovers of chamber music are drawn to the Music Festival in Łańcut, organised in an incredible setting inside one of Poland's most beautiful palaces.**

Łańcut

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# Jazz festivals
## – a class of their own

The Polish music scene can boast a splendid collection of excellent jazzmen. Names such as Krzysztof Komeda, Zbigniew Namysłowski, Michał Urbaniak, Urszula Dudziak, Tomasz Stańko, Jan Ptaszyn Wróblewski, Adam Makowicz and Włodek Pawlik have gained international fame. This genre of music has a lot of dedicated admirers, meaning that jazz festivals are now among the biggest music events in Poland. The most important of these is the Jazz Jamboree, which has always hosted world-class stars. In the past, the line-up has included names such as Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Ray Charles, Wynton Marsalis, Stan Getz and Diana Krall.

Jazz Jamboree is also one of the oldest jazz festivals in Europe, having been attracting fans from all around the world for more than 60 years.

Another interesting event for jazz lovers is the International Jazz at the Old Town Square Festival, a summer festival of music in the unforgettable setting of Warsaw's Old Town.

**Jazz on the Oder and Warsaw Summer Jazz Days are just as popular and much appreciated, with a focus on promoting contemporary jazz.**

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# Theatre and opera
## – a variety of languages

The opera scene in Poland is vibrant and flourishing

Opera has a long and excellent tradition in Poland – in 1628, just thirty years after the birth of this art in Florence, Prince Władysław IV Vasa invited the first Italian opera troupe to Warsaw. The idea fell on fertile ground! Since then, the opera has flourished in Poland with Polish artists enjoying a well-deserved reputation around the world!

The largest opera house in the country is the Teatr Wielki – Polish National Opera in Warsaw. The building, which is also the seat of the Polish National Ballet, the National Opera and the Theatre Museum, is the venue for the most important national artistic events. The National Opera has often seen world-class ensembles performing on its stage.

Polish artists do not only direct and perform in Poland, but their projects are also highly regarded abroad as well. Polish opera singers, such as Piotr

Teatr Wielki

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Słowacki Theatre

Beczała, Aleksandra Kurzak, Mariusz Kwiecień and Andrzej Dobber, have performed on some of the best stages around the world, including New York's Metropolitan Opera, Milan's La Scala, the Paris Opera and many others.

But performances are not all there is to opera: the venues are sometimes real works of art in themselves. These include not only historic buildings, but also examples of intriguing modern architecture. There are so many gems, but the Gdańsk Shakespeare Theatre, the Małopolska Garden of Arts in Kraków and the Centre for the Meeting of Cultures in Lublin are top of the list.

For lovers of historic venues, we also recommend the Słowacki Theatre in Kraków, the Royal Theatre in the Old Orangery in Warsaw, the Adam Mickiewicz Theatre in Cieszyn and the Łańcut Castle Theatre.

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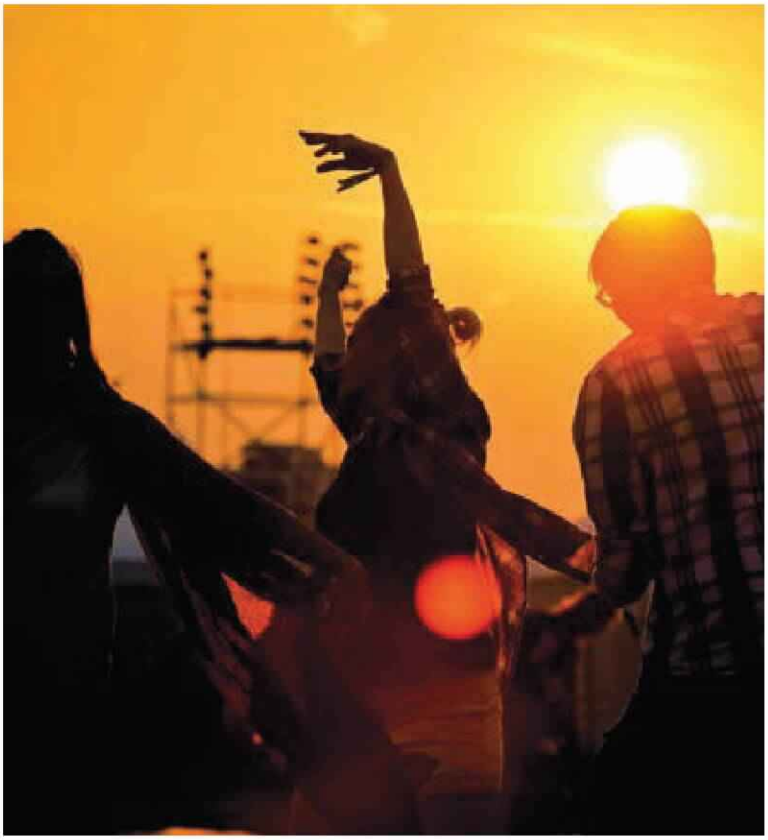

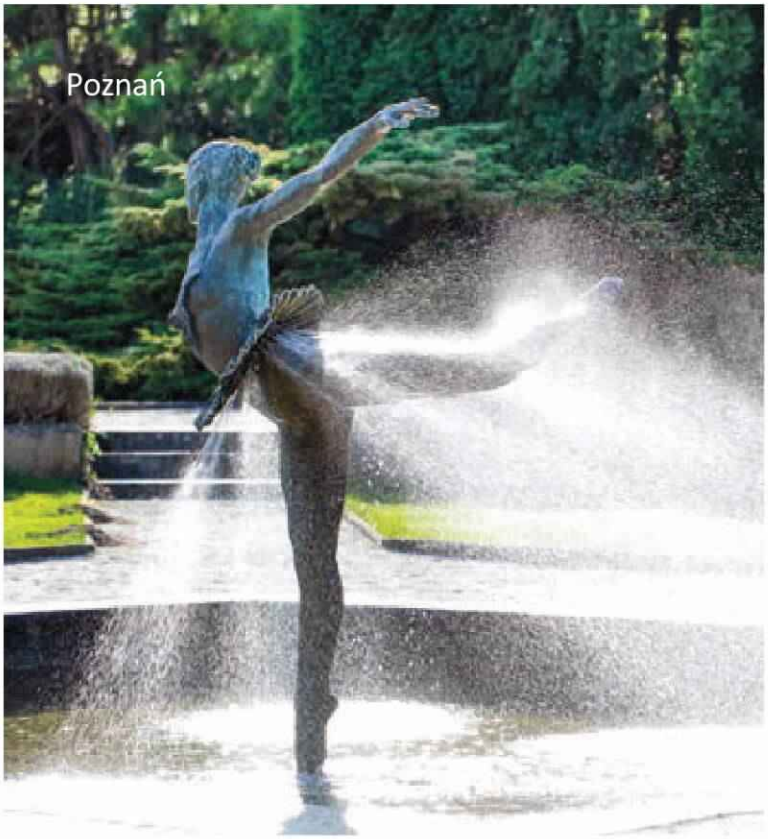


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# Polish dance

Poles love dance - both classic and modern

The polonaise – the Polish dance – was once widespread throughout Europe, as it was usually the dance with which balls began. The name comes from French, but it is also known around the world under the Italian name, la polacca. In Poland, it is still popular, with every graduate of secondary schools familiar with its basic steps, thanks to the fact that it traditionally opens school proms. Perhaps the most well-known polonaises in the world are those composed by Fryderyk Chopin.

Traditional dance is very spectacular, so it is no wonder that performances by the ensembles that present them are so popular with audiences. Names such as the "Mazowsze" Song and Dance Ensemble, the "Śląsk" Song and Dance Ensemble and the "Warszawianka" Folk Song and Dance Ensemble of the University of Warsaw are brands in themselves, bringing together top-class musicians. They will sing, play and dance just about everything, and there are always large crowds eagerly awaiting their concerts – both in Poland and abroad.

## Modern dance is also developing dynamically

The Polish Dance Theatre – Poznań Ballet, which combines in its choreography neo-classical techniques with modern dance and collaborates with outstanding artists from all over the world, has won recognition on all five continents.

Outside the large cities, local centres have also emerged, producing and promoting ambitious artistic projects on a smaller scale and bringing together young dancers, who have very often gained their experience at artistic universities abroad.

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# Reconstructions of past events

Historical reconstructions generate huge interest all over the world

Recreating history brings with it a great deal of emotion as well as being engaging and educational. This way of gaining knowledge through experience is becoming increasingly popular. All over Poland, there are dozens of knights' tournaments, medieval picnics and the reconstructions of battles from various eras, as well as crafts festivals.
Festivals presenting distant history have invariably been very popular. Biskupin, a reconstructed settlement from the 10th century, has for many years now been home to the Archaeological Festival, with a fair of traditional crafts and various shows. But even outside the festival, there is a lot you can do in Biskupin! The local archaeological reserve is one of the largest in Europe and certainly one of the most interesting. It shows the lives of people from the Stone Age to the early Middle Ages.

Nowa Słupia

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Another exciting open-air museum can be found on the island of Wolin: the Jomsborg-Vineta Centre of Slavs and Vikings. It features a number of reconstructed structures from early-medieval Wolin, including almost 30 huts, defence embankments and a harbour waterfront from which you can take a trip on a longboat. At numerous workshops and at the annual festival, you can see and experience up close what life was like 1,000 years ago.

A similar festival takes place in Nowa Słupia. Known as "Dymarki Świętokrzyskie", it is held at the site of interesting archaeological discoveries at the foot of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains and allows visitors to see presentations of iron smelting using ancient methods. In addition to the Iron Age settlement, it is worth visiting the modern Museum of the Świętokrzyskie Ancient Iron Industry.

When it comes to events on a truly epic scale, re-enactments of great medieval battles rarely disappoint. The staging commemorating the 1410 Battle of Grunwald takes place every year on a weekend close to its anniversary, i.e. 14 July. More than 2,000 knights from Poland, all over Europe and even the United States take part in this unique event. In the camps, which can be viewed several days before the battle, several thousand reenactors recreate the conditions of medieval life. The Museum of the Battle of Grunwald opened recently in the village of Stębark.

Just one week later in July, another large-scale reconstruction takes place: the siege of Malbork, the world's largest brick fortress. Each year, the past comes to life as knights make camp under the castle walls. Attractions include not only knights' duels and horse shows, but also a crafts fair.

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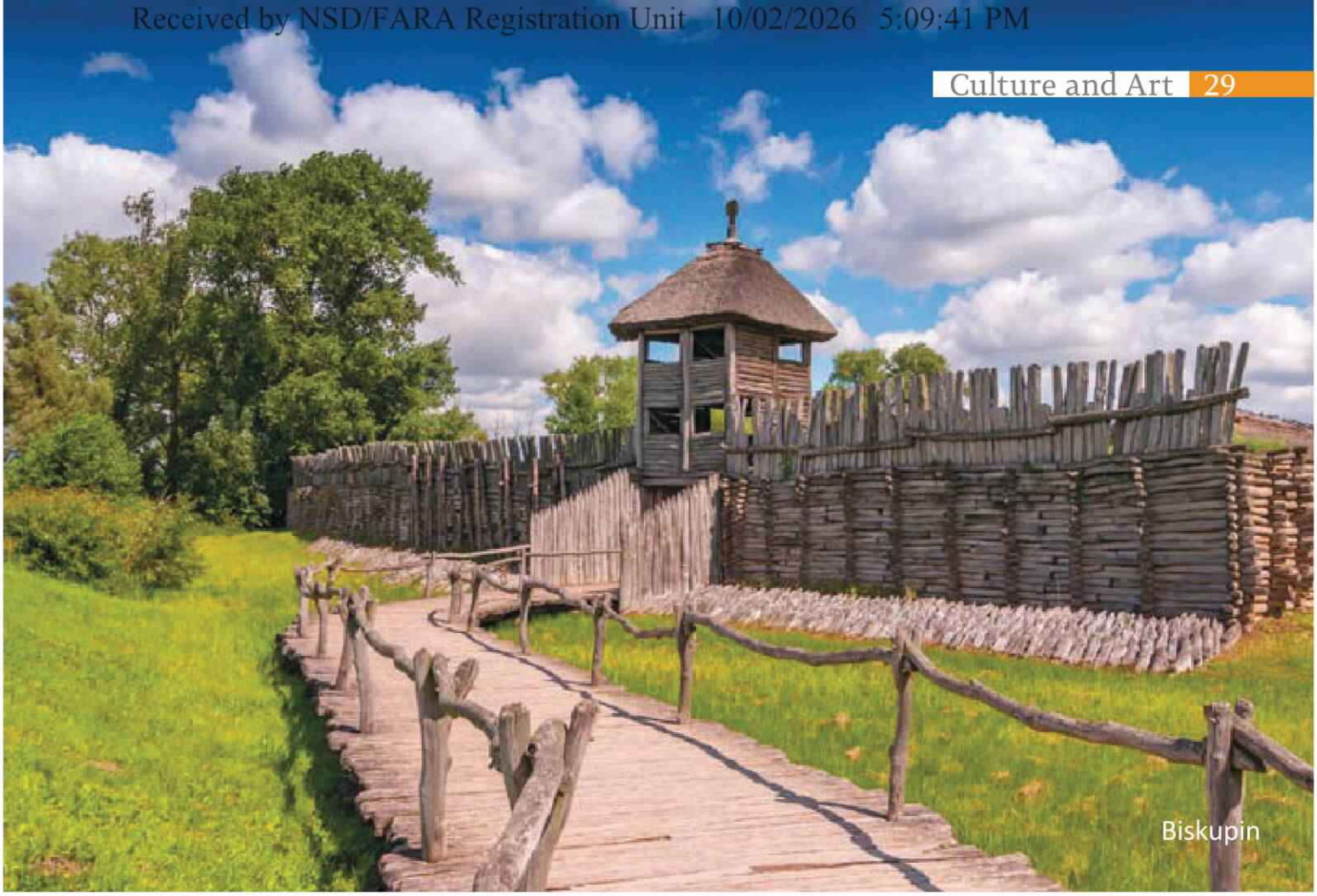

Biskupin

Wolin

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# Museums

More than 200 years have passed since the creation of the Temple of the Sibyl in Puławy - Poland's first museum. A lot has changed since then, but museums still remain a place for encounters with culture. Rather than stately edifices safekeeping exhibits, modern museums are increasingly becoming state-of-the-art institutions that explain the world and intrigue visitors. Some entertain, while others are more solemn

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Although it is difficult to imagine a museum facility without some interactive elements these days, there are museums in which modern multimedia exhibition systems play a special role. There are many such places, which are a must-see when in Poland. Porta Posnania (Interactive Cathedral Island Heritage Centre in Poznań) presents over a thousand years of the city's history and allows visitors to discover the place where Polish statehood was born. The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw presents the history of Polish Jews over many centuries, from the Middle Ages to modern times. The modern building of the museum has been recognised as a pearl of architecture and has won many international awards and distinctions. The Warsaw Rising Museum, which opened its doors on the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, is a symbol of the Polish people's fight for the freedom of their homeland. Situated in a former tram depot, the museum harmoniously combines the painful memories of those heroic efforts with new technologies, allowing you to look at Warsaw in a completely different way. Together with other institutions, the Silesian Museum, housed in a former coal mine, forms the Cultural Zone – a new hub of cultural life in Katowice. The modern architecture does not allow visitors to forget the city's mining roots – the main part of the complex is a building in which three levels are underground. Interestingly, Kraków can also be explored from underground! The exhibition entitled "Following the traces of

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Rising Museum

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Wawel Castle

Royal Castle in Warsaw

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European identity in Kraków" is a unique subterranean exhibition, located right below the Main Market Square. It allows visitors to not only see but touch the history of the legendary city.

Another type of museum where one can explore Polish culture are castles and palaces, and in particular royal residences. While in Poland, you simply must not miss Wawel, the impressive royal castle in Kraków, nor the later residence of the Polish rulers – the Royal Castle in Warsaw. The summer residences of the royals are also worth a visit: Łazienki Park and Wilanów Palace are perfect for walks at any time of the year.

Every fan of contemporary art who wants to become familiar with the works of Polish artists should visit Zachęta – National Gallery of Art in Warsaw. Ever since the doors first opened at the dawn of the 20th century, its mission has been to present and promote Polish art. The collection encompasses more than 3,500 works of art, including paintings, sculptures, installations, videos and more. You can admire the works of 20th century classics of Polish art, such as Tadeusz Kantor and Alina Szapocznikow, as well as world-famous contemporary Polish artists: Mirosław Bałka, Katarzyna Kozyra, Zbigniew Libera, Wilhelm Sasnal and other renowned representatives of the younger generation. Another museum not to be missed if you are a fan of modern art is the MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków, which showcases international art. The most important goals that MOCAK has set for itself are to present the art of the past two decades and to explain the meaning behind its creation.

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# Jan Matejko (1838-1893)

He became an icon of Polish painting while he was still alive. During the difficult times of lost independence, many generations of Poles sought patriotic solace in his works

Matejko studied at the School of Fine Arts in Kraków. His main focus was on Polish history, but he enjoyed international fame and had his works exhibited in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Prague and Budapest. He is the most outstanding representative of the historical direction in Polish painting. While working in the times of Poland's partitions, he depicted the most splendid political and military victories: *Stefan Batory at Pskov, The Battle of Grunwald, The Prussian Homage* and *Jan III Sobieski at Vienna*. He also explored the historical causes of the downfall of the Republic of Poland with such paintings as *Stańczyk, Skarga's Sermon* and *Rejtan*. His most important goal was to build patriotic feelings. He left behind over 300 oil paintings and several hundred drawings and sketches. In recognition of his merit for Kraków, the city's authorities bought his home and turned it into a museum.

National Museum in Warsaw

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The Palace of Fine Arts in Kraków

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# Other famous artists

Other Polish artists worth discovering are Stanisław Wyspiański, Władysław Ślewiński, Aleksander Gierymski, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Nowosielski, Andrzej Wróblewski, Władysław Strzemiński, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz – Witkacy, Józef Mehoffer, Olga Boznańska, Anna Bilińska, Tamara Łempicka... And their works can be found in museums and galleries throughout the country. Works by Polish artists can also increasingly be found in galleries all around the world; sometimes more often than at home.

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## Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930-2017)

She was a sculptor whose works transcended the conventional limits of this discipline. Throughout the world, her vast, abstract weaving structures have brought her fame, immortalising her name, as they have come to be known as *Abakans*. Abakanowicz's works decorate public spaces in many places around the world, including in France, South Korea, Japan and the United States. Her works are also displayed in many galleries and museums around the world, while in Poland the largest collection of her pieces is kept by the National Museum in Wrocław.

## Igor Mitoraj (1944-2014)

Although he completed his studies in the painting department, he is one of the world's most outstanding sculptors. The Mitoraj style is very distinctive and easily recognisable. The main subject of his works is the human body, with his inspiration coming from Antiquity. His works can be admired in museums, foundations and in the public space of the most important cities in the world. Mitoraj's sculptures – often gigantic – embellish the cities of Rome, Paris, Milan and London, as well as Warsaw and Kraków. His works can also be found in Japan and the United States.

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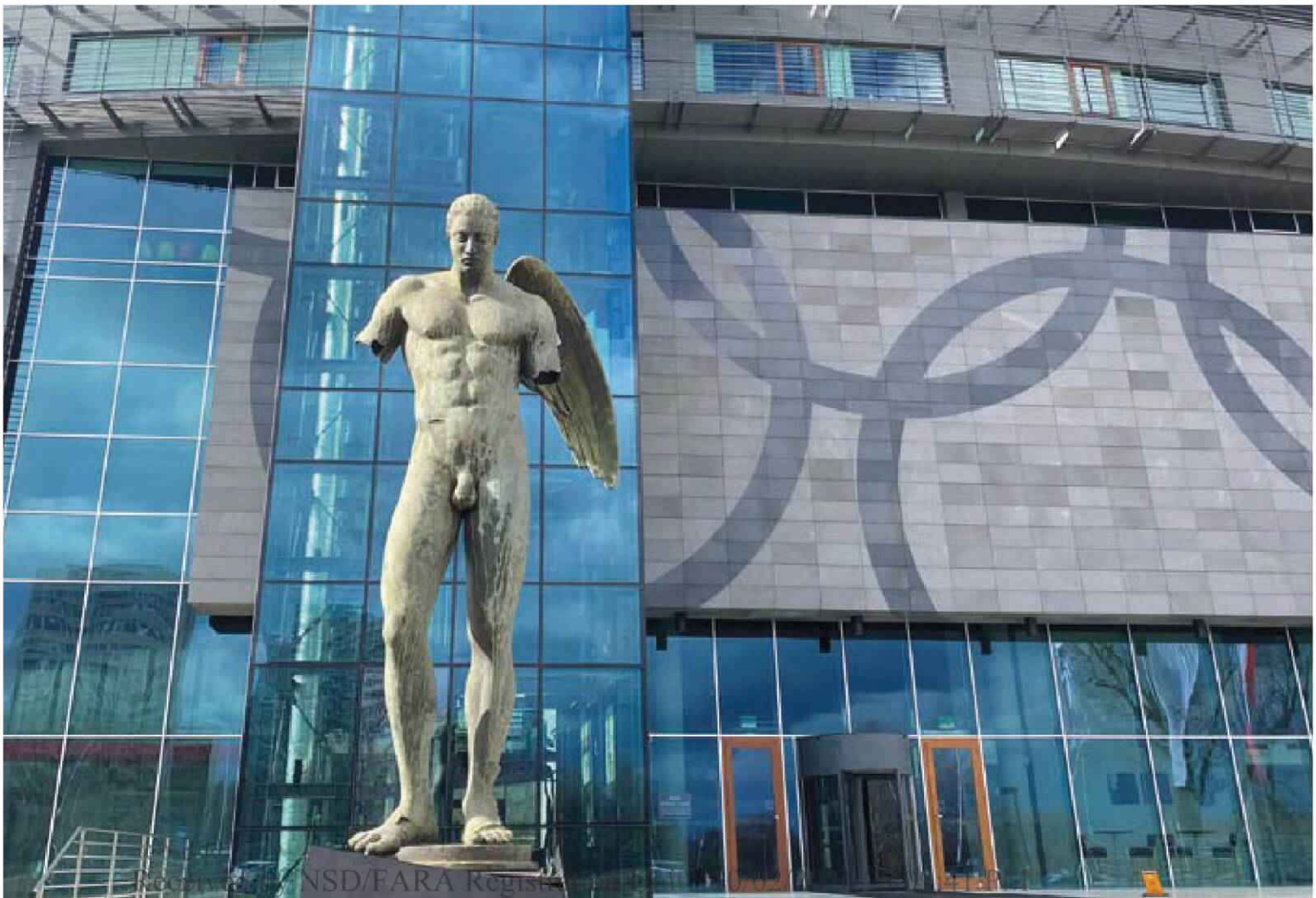

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# Murals

Once heavily frowned upon, today they are increasingly appreciated and treated as an important part of the urban landscape. Many Polish cities can boast quite a large collection of artistic murals. Artists from all over the world have created their works on the walls of towns and cities.

The capital of street art is Łódź. Everywhere you turn, you will see murals, pavement paintings and artistic installations on buildings, with street art having become one of the city's important symbols. Other cities such as Poznań, Gdańsk and Białystok, and even the small Świdnica, also deserve the title of a city of murals. Katowice and Warsaw regularly organise street art festivals.

You can take a walk following a trail of murals in almost any city.

Białystok

Łódź

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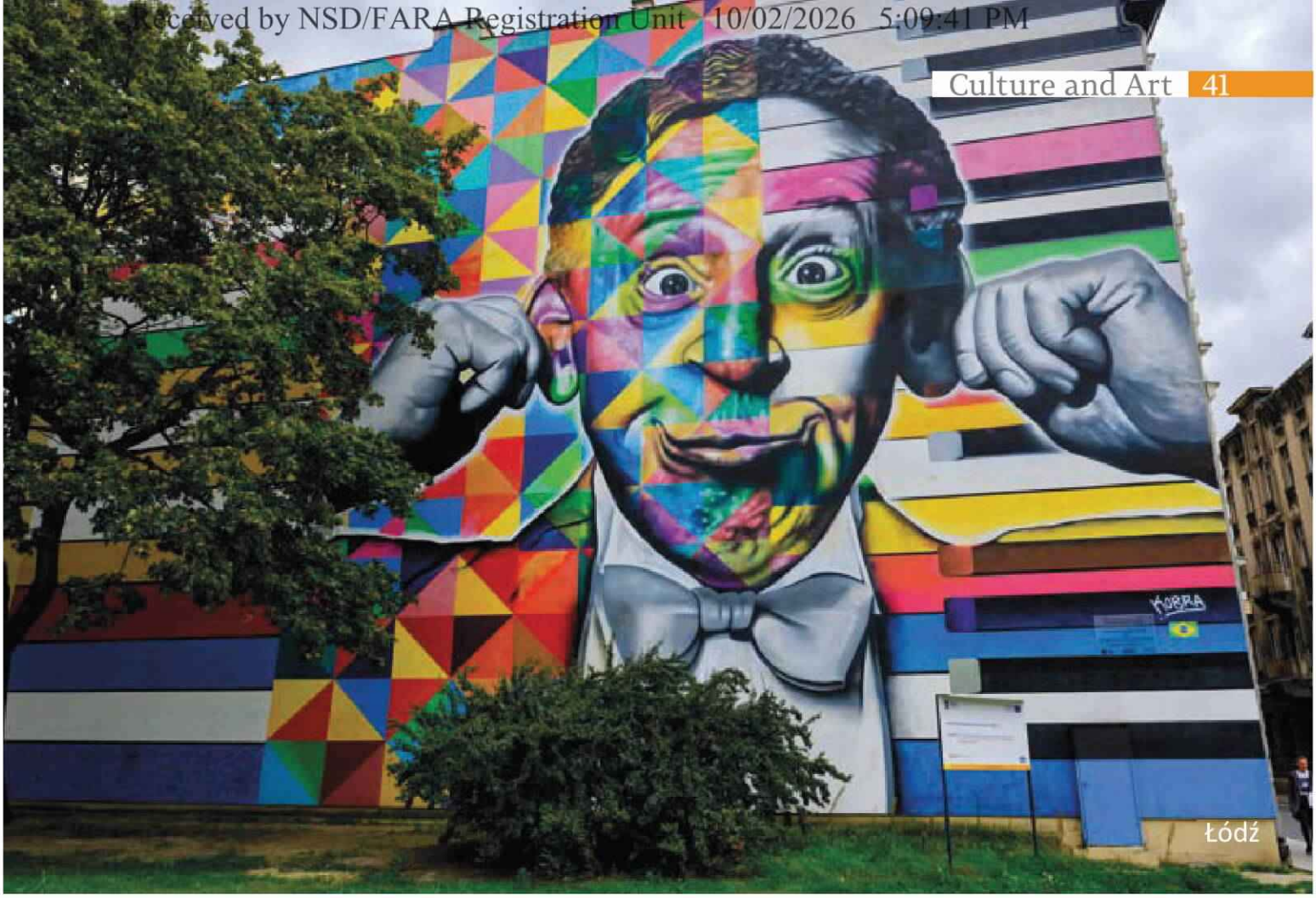


Łódź

Warszawa

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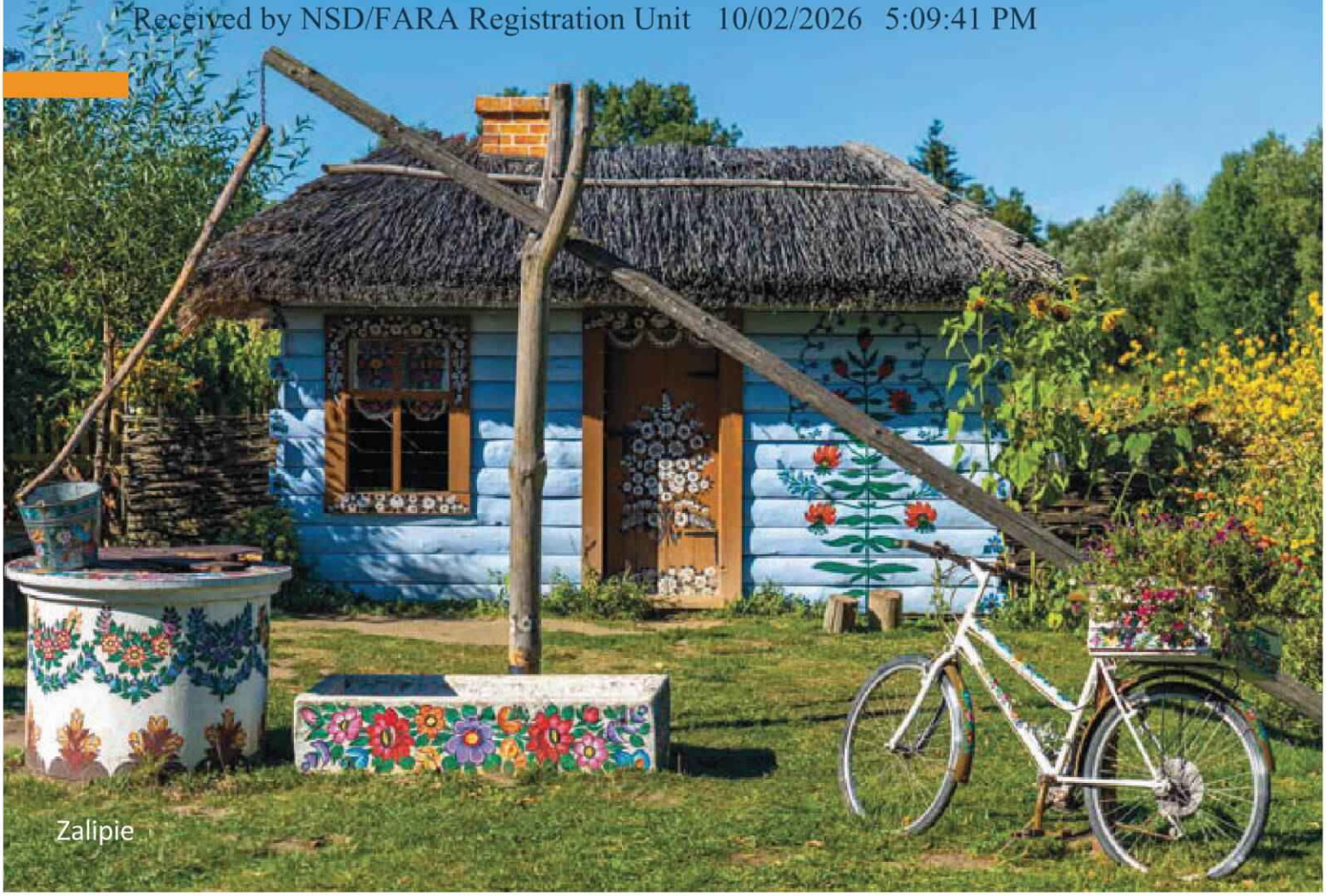
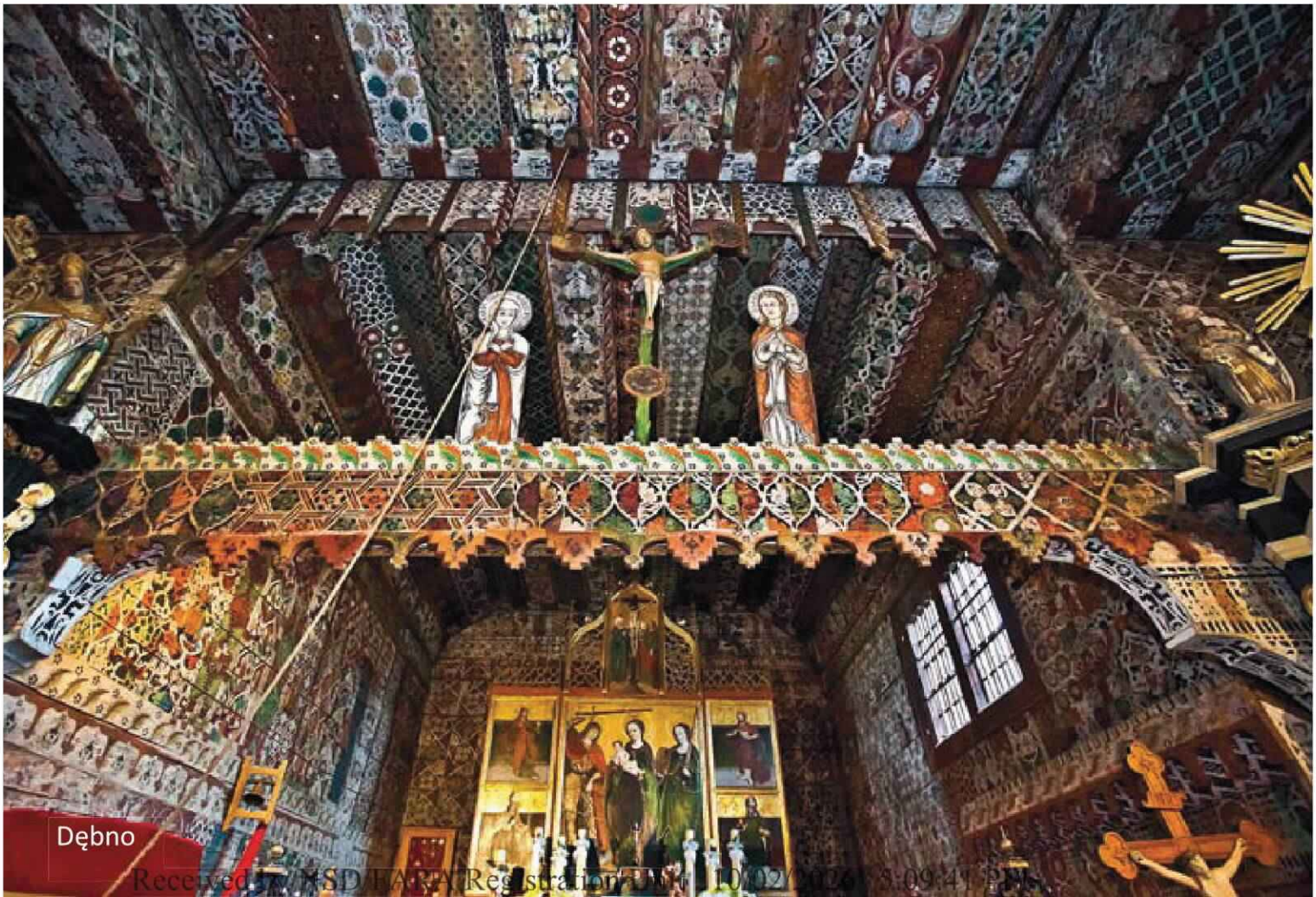


Zalipie



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# Architecture

The oldest preserved buildings in Poland are found near Poznań and Kraków – according to historians, it was there that the Polish state was forged as early as the 10th century. Those are mainly religious buildings because, unlike homes, they were built from stone

The traditional Polish countryside relied on wood as a building material, with the differences between regions expressed mainly in the shape and decoration of the buildings. Most of the many preserved wooden buildings are in Małopolska, which is why the Wooden Architecture Route was created, boasting 252 Catholic and Orthodox churches as well as individual buildings.

Throughout the country, wooden buildings are protected in open-air museums. Old farming tools are displayed in the interiors, along with fully furnished living quarters. Apart from the cottages inhabited by the peasant class, visitors can also see the characteristic traditional Polish architecture of manor houses of the nobility, very often including a porch with columns. Another interesting feature of southern Poland is the authentic 17th century wooden inns serving regional dishes. Meanwhile, the charming village of Zalipie owes its unique character to the flowers painted on houses.

**Since the introduction of industrial dyes, ultramarine has been used widely, spreading the use of blue as a wall colour.**

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Due to both the terrain and the country's tumultuous history, the architecture throughout Poland is very diverse. The structures in the south of the country are very different from those in the north, and the architecture of Western Poland has little in common with what is known as the Eastern wall.

All around the country, there are magnificent palaces with rich interiors. The objects collected in them can be a guide to the changing fashion trends, as well as a guide to the history of the country and subsequent generations of a given family.

In recent years, several stunning buildings have been created in Poland – a treat for fans of architecture, though you don't have to know anything about structural engineering to appreciate their qualities.

Another interesting example of architecture can be found in Warsaw. It is a small residential house built in a narrow gap between other buildings. Known as the Keret House, it is about 152 cm wide and just 92 cm at its narrowest point! The house has three floors and, despite such narrow quarters, there is room for a kitchen, a bathroom, a work area and a place to sleep.

Wilanów

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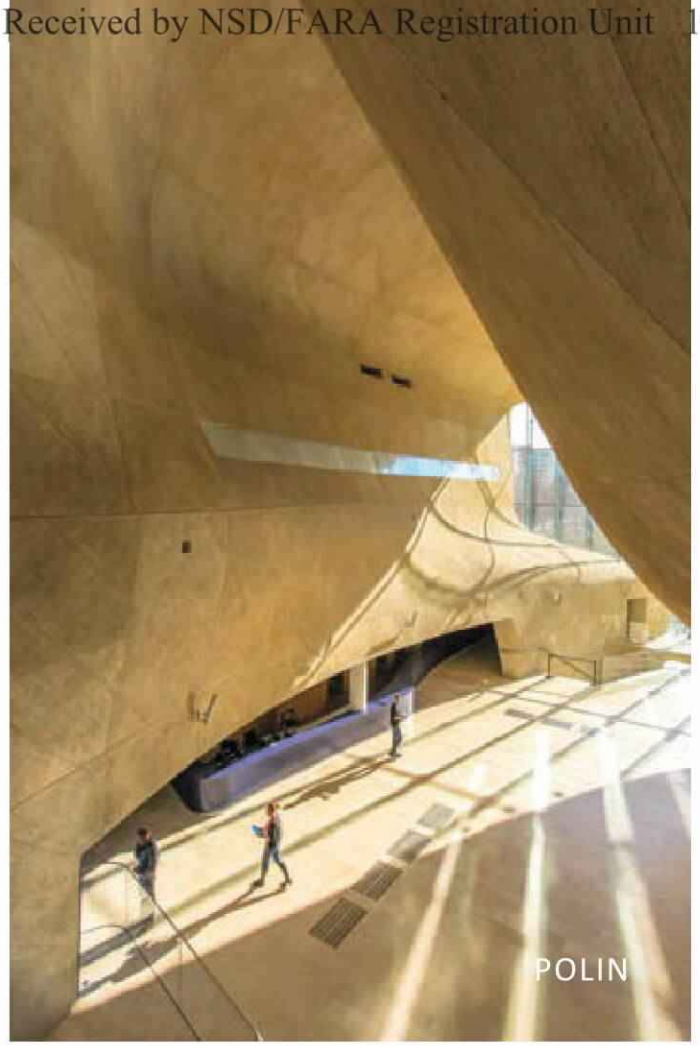

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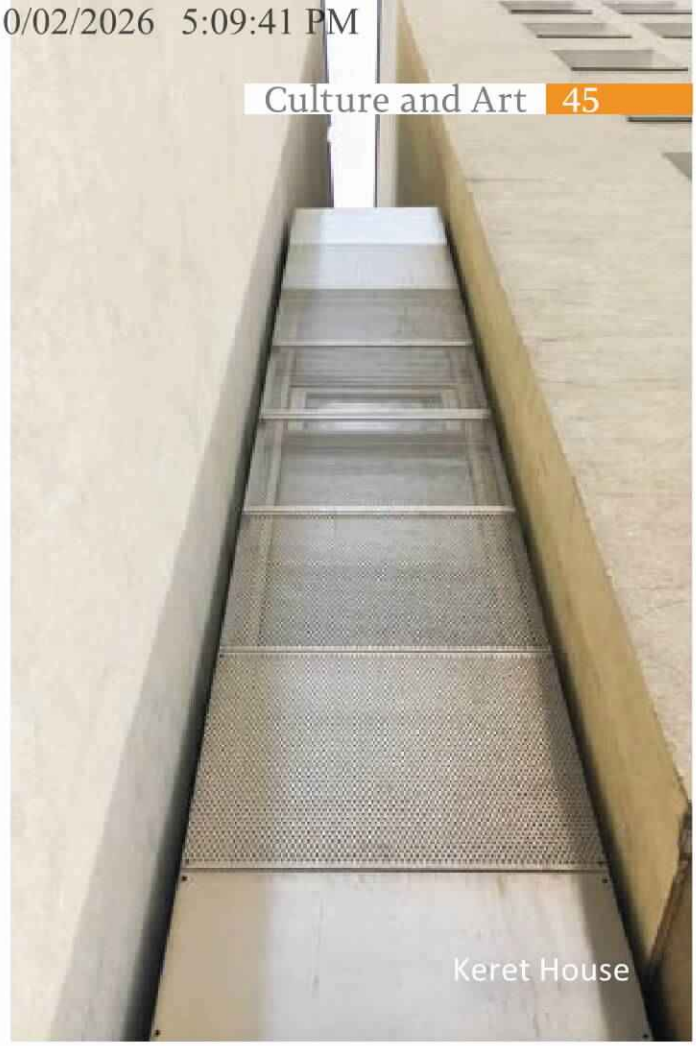

Keret House

Szczecin Philharmonia

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# Folklore and folk costumes

Polish folk costumes are comparable to meadows filled with colourful flowers. There are several dozen kinds, each with local varieties

A parade of couples dressed in folk costumes is a true festival of fabrics, lace, hand-made embroidery, glittering sequins and beads. In the lowlands, the Łowicz costume stands out with its colourful stripes, while the main motif of the highland costumes from Podhale is the *parzenica*, an original heart-shaped design. Elegant ladies from the Kurpie region always accessorised with a string of amber beads, while the distinctive feature of the Kraków costume is the men's cap called *rogatywka*. In women's garb, the red beads contrast with white shirts worn under velvety corsets, richly embroidered and decorated with colourful sequins. Folk costumes are now experiencing a sort of renaissance, often being worn by staff at regional restaurants. There are also artistic collections that are made for dolls.

**In some regions, people are happy to wear their colourful folk costumes for the holidays and celebrations even today.**

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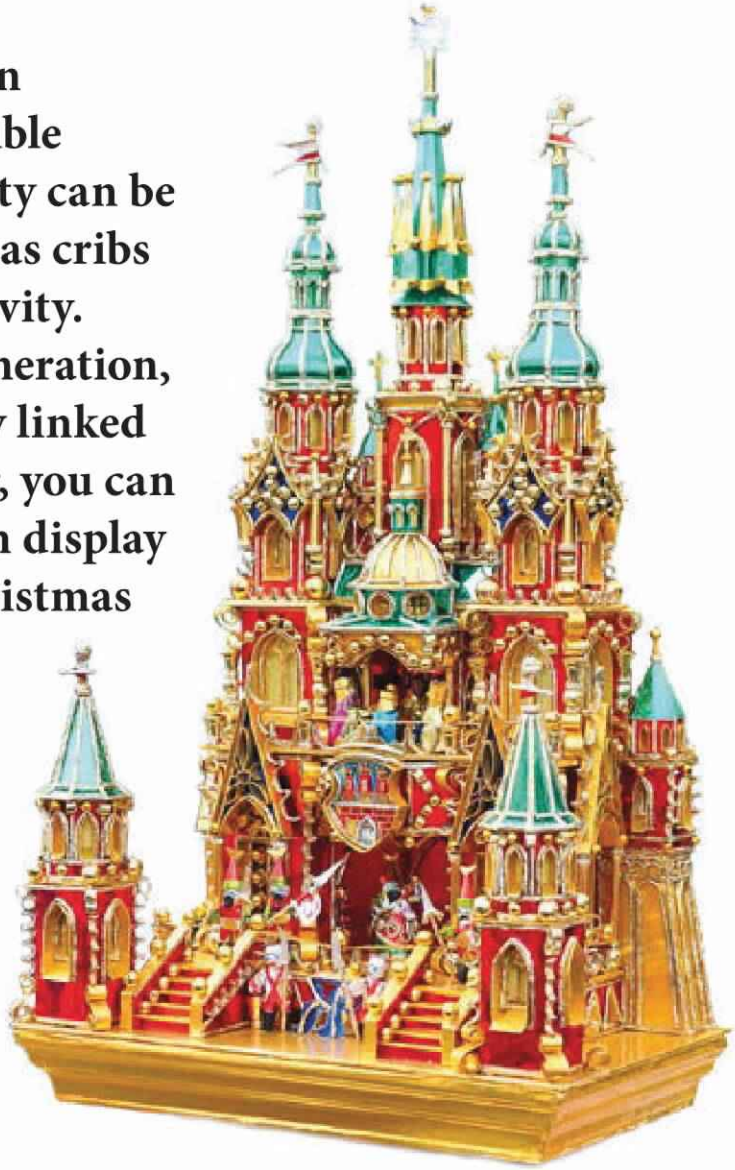
The best opportunity to see a parade in folk costumes is a visit to Poland around Corpus Christi. This holiday is always celebrated on a Thursday, 60 days after Easter, so at the earliest on 21 May and at the latest on 24 June. The most colourful procession of all takes place in Łowicz.
The celebration of Corpus Christi is also a great opportunity to learn some of the other customs that accompany the processions in several places. One of them is the tradition of laying flower carpets, a custom that was included on UNESCO's List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The floral carpets are made mainly in Spycimierz in the Łódzkie Voivodeship, as well as in several villages in the Opolskie Voivodeship (in Olszowa, Zimna Wódka, Zalesie Śląskie and Klucz).

**Another entry from Poland on UNESCO's List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity can be seen in Kraków - the Christmas cribs showing scenes from the Nativity. Passed from generation to generation, this traditional craft is closely linked to the region. Each December, you can see the most beautiful ones on display after the Annual Kraków Christmas Crib Competition.**



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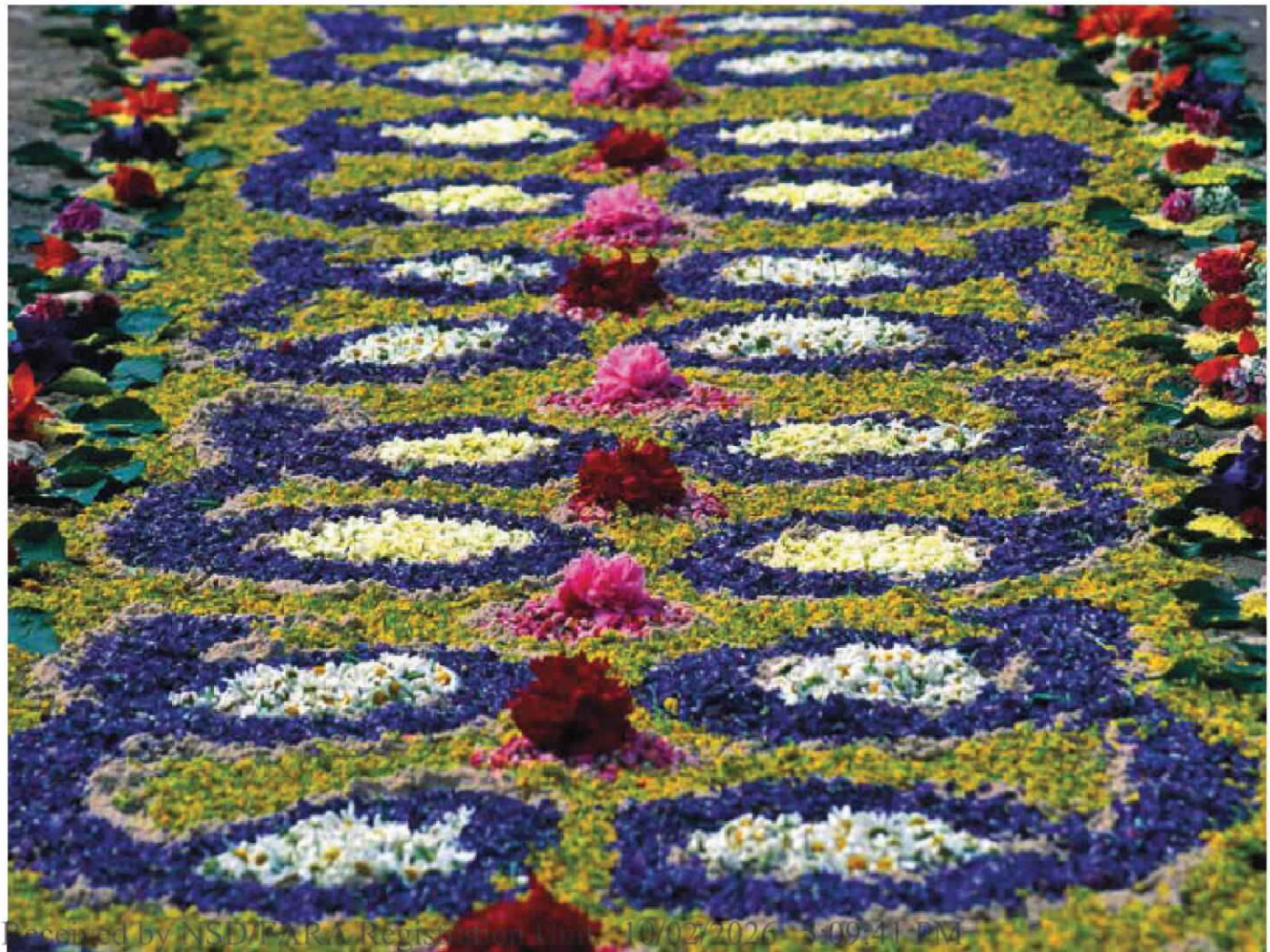

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# Traditional holidays

The most important Polish holidays are Christmas and Easter. Poles are eagerly awaiting these special occasions almost all year

Every year on 24 December, Polish families sit down to have their Christmas Eve dinner together. The tables are heavy with fish, most often carp, mushroom soup (or red beetroot soup known as *barszcz*, with mushroom-filled dumplings, depending on the region), pierogi, cabbage with split peas and assorted sweets. Tradition has it that there should be a total of twelve festive dishes. At this special time, Christmas carols can be heard in many places, and gifts await under the decorated Christmas trees.

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Easter, which heralds the arrival of spring, is also an important holiday for Poles. Just as during Christmas, whole families gather at the table. This time, however, the meal is a festive breakfast. The Easter tradition follows the customs of painting and blessing eggs, an archetype of life reborn. The patterns, colours and even techniques vary by region when it comes to decorating Easter eggs. Easter also involves baking sweet treats, especially the traditional *babka* (bundt) cakes and the richly decorated *mazurek* cakes.

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# Discovering Polish cuisine
## – regional delicacies and flavourful festivals

They say the best way to experience any new country is by trying its national dishes. Poland is famous for its tasty and low-processed food. The richness of flavours is a heritage of our centuries-old history and a reflection of the influence of various cultures

While in Poland, make a point to try some typical dishes. Perhaps the most popular is the internationally famous *pierogi*, which can be savoury – filled with minced meat, mushrooms, various vegetables and even buckweat groats – or sweet, with a fruit or sweet cheese filling. Other well-known Polish dishes include *bigos*, pork chops and various soups. Pickled foods are very popular too, especially cabbage, gherkins and mushrooms. Regional cheeses are delicious – the most famous kind, *oscypek*, is certainly not the only cheese we recommend you try!

Although traditional Polish cuisine is not automatically associated with vegetarian food, you should know that it actually has a lot of meatless dishes. Since ancient times, Poles have been making all sorts of dumplings, noodles, pancakes and dishes using legumes. On top of that, Warsaw has for years been high in the ranking of the most vegan capitals of the world. There are many places serving cruelty-free food.

**In Poland, pierogi can be served both in a savoury and sweet variant.**

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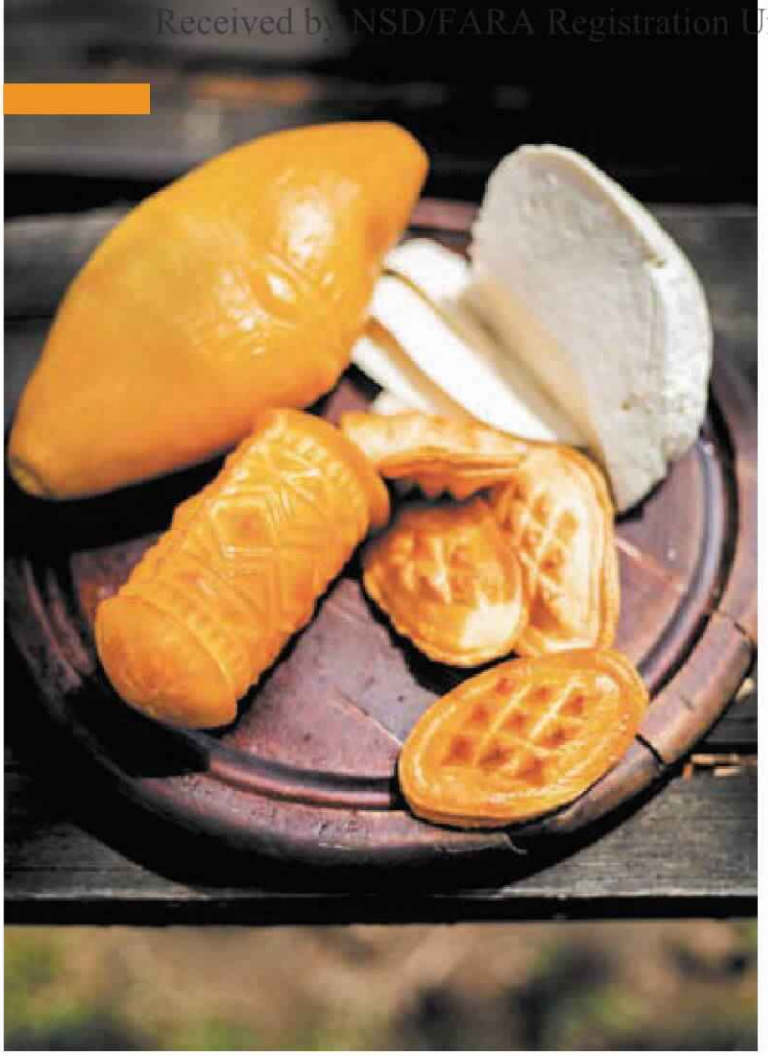

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The geographical diversity and cultural influences associated with the country's rich history make Polish cuisine very diverse. Local delicacies created using carefully guarded recipes and traditional food production methods all make up the treasure that is our national culinary culture.
Dozens of larger and smaller culinary events are held in Poland throughout the course of the year. Those festivals celebrate regional or international cuisine. In many places you can also participate in events dedicated to Polish wine, beer or honey.
One of the biggest and most interesting culinary events is Poland's Good Taste Festival (aka Poznań Food Days) organised in Poznań, at which stalls from all regions of Poland encourage visitors to try local delicacies. Another festival worth mentioning is *Festiwal Smaku* (Festival of Flavour) in the village of Gruczno, where regional specialities take centre stage. The most important of them are included on the list of traditional products. Part of the festival is the Turniej Nalewek. Held for over 15 years now, this event is an occasion to try *nalewki*, traditional Polish liqueurs. When planning a stay in Silesia, put the Silesian Flavours festival on your agenda, along with the culinary trail under the same name.

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Most events and fairs across the country offer the opportunity to try traditional Polish food.

A popular snack at the festivals is a slice of bread with pork dripping and a pickled cucumber. Tourists often fall in love with the taste of Polish bread, especially fresh sourdough, light or dark, baked in traditional ovens. Several festivals are associated with the culture of winemaking, which is now experiencing a revival. The oldest and largest of them is Winobranie in Zielona Góra. One of its many attractions is the colourful procession passing through the city streets. The wine harvest is celebrated in many regions. Most of the vineyards are registered in Małopolska, with the area around Tarnów now known as "Polish Tuscany". ENOTarnowskie is a selection of dozens of vineyards in one place, and a range of delicious local products that you can pair up with the drink of your choice.

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## Cakes and pastries are important elements of Polish cuisine

Poles love *szarlotka* – a kind of apple tart made using delicious Polish apples and other seasonal fruit cakes, as well as cheesecakes, poppyseed rolls, yeast cakes and *jagodzianki* (sweet blueberry buns).

The sweetest day of the year in Poland is Fat Thursday! According to this pleasant tradition, coming on the Thursday before Lent, everyone should have their fill of *pączki* (Polish doughnuts) to ensure happiness and prosperity throughout the year. That is why you will see queues of eager customers waiting for their calorie-laden, tasty treats throughout Poland on that day.

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Museum of Amber

Mariacka Street

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# Amber
## – a treasure from the sea

Also known as "Polish gold", amber is by far the oldest and most valuable export from the Baltic shore

Smaller and larger pieces of amber – the fossilised resin of coniferous trees that grew 40 million years ago – are cast on the seashore by the Baltic waves. The capital of amber is without any doubt the city of Gdańsk, where a museum dedicated to this extraordinary treasure is located in the Grand Mill. The collection includes old and contemporary products from leading designers, while the multimedia exhibition allows you to find yourself in an amber forest, enjoy the smell of amber, and participate in a show of amber jewellery.

Every year, the "Amberif" International Fair of Amber and Jewellery is held in Gdańsk. However, throughout the whole country, jewellery with amber can be purchased at jewellery stores, galleries and gift fairs.

**The best-known and very chic "Amber Fifth Avenue" with several dozen shops and galleries selling amber in every form can be found – you guessed it – in Gdańsk.**

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# Ceramics
## – an original souvenir from Poland

Polish potteries make good use of national and local decorative motifs and the talent of native craftsmen

Bolesławiec, a small town in Lower Silesia, is hands down the capital of Polish pottery. Signature designs from Bolesławiec are recognised worldwide. They are inspired by the local tradition and draw on folk motifs. Hand-decorated plates, cups and ceramic bowls from Boleslawiec are among the most popular "Made in Poland" gifts.

The high-quality products of the porcelain factories in Ćmielów and Chodzież are also known and sought by collectors worldwide, along with products of the Kristoff brand from Wałbrzych.

The beginnings of porcelain production in the town of Ćmielów in the Świętokrzyski region date back to the turn of the 19th century, meaning it has more than 200 years of tradition. The local porcelain factories specialise in the manual production of luxury items that cultivate old traditions. The traditional way of production is combined with world-class design and new trends – there is no doubt that porcelain products are often absolute works of art.

Kristoff is another of Poland's oldest porcelain factories. Founded in the middle of the 19th century, it offers a number of classic table porcelain designs, including ones that have been produced in the same form since the 1930s, alongside modern designs, the works of young designers.

If you are hoping to take home some beautiful and unique products, you might also want to look out for the small, less well-known craft workshops. Their excellent designs and the fact that they are unique makes Polish porcelain so popular!

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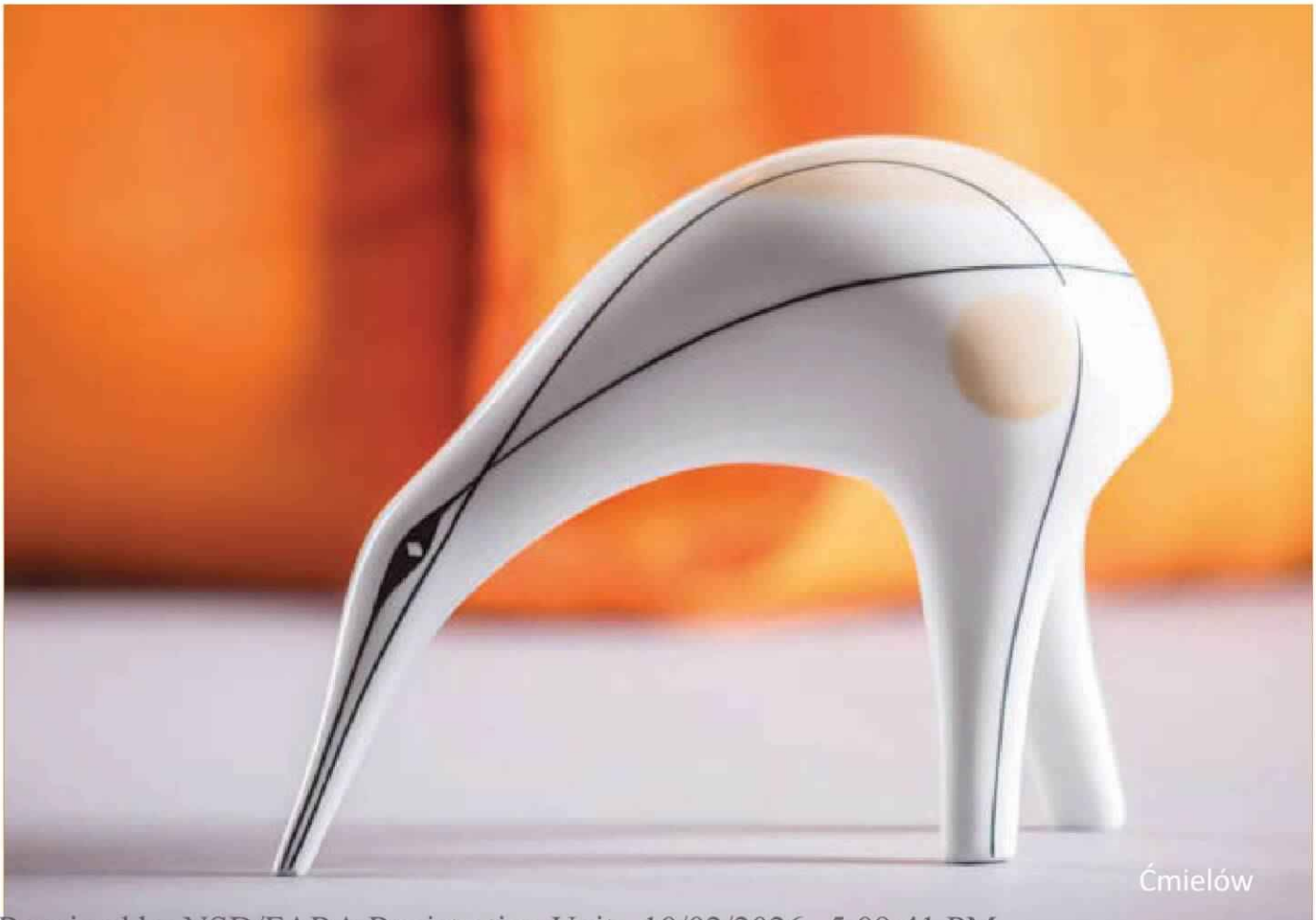
Bolesławiec



Ćmielów

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# Glass
## – a Polish speciality

Glasses, jugs and platters designed by Polish artists can be purchased in galleries and shops around the world, but we highly recommend buying them in Poland, where they come from

The tradition of glass production in Poland goes back several centuries, and Polish artists are famous for their design of unusual glass forms. The main production centre for artistic glass in Poland is Krosno. The Krosno Glassworks specialise both in utility and decorative objects. The Glass Heritage Centre at the Krosno plant is not just a modern museum and laboratory comprehensively presenting the world of glass. It also organises concerts and exhibitions of glass jewellery, shows in which glass-blowing masters present their skills, and viewings of films about the history and art of glass production. In addition, there are showcases for the works of artists whose medium is glass. In educational labs, visitors can conduct experiments using lenses, optical fibres and kaleidoscopes. On the lowest floor you can admire an illusionist painting fit for the 21st century.

The Julia Glassworks in Piechowice manufactures crystal glass products. The local tradition of glassmaking dates back to the 19th century, when glass products were created here by the Silesian Schaffgotsch family. The Julia Glassworks in Piechowice is proud to continue a tradition for which the region of Karkonosze has been known for centuries. Production takes place mainly by hand or using simple machines. The original factory is open for visitors. In addition, an educational centre called Krystalium has recently been opened, dedicated to crystal glass and its history and importance in the local culture.

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