

Wanda Bibrowicz-Wislicenus' art nouveau designs and weaving work

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Abstract

Wanda Bibrowicz, who graduated in portrait painting from Breslauer Königliche Kunst- und Gewerbeschule and led its pioneer textile class between 1904-1911, is probably the best known Central Europe textile artist who practised Art Nouveau weaving. After her first pedagogic activity she ran a successful private workshop in Szklarska Poręba as part of a famous artistic colony set with the poet Carl Hauptmann. Following her master and husband, Max Wislicenus' idea of “an artist as a weaver and a weaver as an artist”, she was one of the first craftswomen to promote this approach. After poetic Art Nouveau designs of plants and animals, she developed her style to complex narrative scenes with elements of Art Deco but still a dreamy atmosphere. She is an author of over a hundred works, of which 46 survived the World War II, and are now part of several Polish and German collections. Although she played an important role in education of new designers in Breslau and afterwards in Pillnitz near Dresden (1920-1939), only a few specialists have heard of her work so far.

Wanda Bibrowicz (1878-1954) is a female art nouveau artist who deserves much more attention from both scholars and the public. Her importance stems not only from her artistic achievements, but also from her social standing at that time and place as a woman artist and partner of an art professor who was then married to another woman.

She came from an artistically skilled Polish family based in Grodzisk Wielkopolski in West Poland.¹ Initially, she wanted to become a painter. In 1896 she began studying art

¹ The cited biographical data of the artist is mostly based on the monograph: Ewa Maria Poradowska-Werszler, *W kręgu sztuki Wandy Bibrowicz / Im Kreis der Kunst von Wanda Bibrowicz*, Wrocław (private edition) 2001 and the lexical note by the same author: „Bibrowicz-Wislicenus Franciszka Wanda, artysta tkacz pedagog” in *Słownik Biograficzny Ziemi Jeleniogórskiej* [online: <http://jbc.jelenia-gora.pl/Content/380/bibrowicz.html>]. **On Bibrowicz see also:** Teresa Kmiecńska-Kaczmarek, „Nieznana artystka polska Wanda Bibrowicz 1878-1954”,

pedagogy and portrait painting at the Royal School of Arts and Crafts (Königliche Kunst- und Gewerbeschule) in Wrocław (the then Breslau in Germany). Her master was Max Wislicenus, an important art nouveau artist who only recently came to the city to teach at the school. Educated in Munich and fascinated by the art nouveau movement there, the art professor was regarded as the founder of the Breslau landscape painting school. In the course of time, Wislicenus began to transgress the traditional medium and became involved in a reform initiated by the director of the School at that time, the famous architect Hans Poelzig. The architect took over as head of the institution after the death of his predecessor Hermann Kühn in 1903.² Poelzig was under a strong influence of William Morris' ideas of Arts and Crafts and the concept of modern English landhouse which won a great popularity with German-speaking Central European artists immediately after the publication of Stefan Muthesius' books, especially *Das moderne Landhaus und seine innere Ausstattung* (München 1904).³ Consequently, the main aim of the reform was to introduce the crafts as a branch of fine arts, a trend which defined the arts at the turn of the 19th century and was present all over Europe at that time.

Wislicenus' work became known to a wider audience only after his first retrospective exhibition held at Wrocław in the 1920s. However, German-speaking art journals had been regularly publishing articles on his various activities and the reproductions of his work already from the early 1900s. Many of these articles, especially those covering Wislicenus' commitment to the revival of the artistic craft, mentioned Bibrowicz as his main helper and executor of his ideas and designs for the craft.⁴ Nearly forgotten after WW2, the painter was

Przegląd artystyczny 1972, no 3, p. 45; Joanna Nowosielska-Sobel, „Wanda Bibrowicz: artystka, mistrzyni gobelinu”, in *Wybitni wrocławianie, vol. 3: Osobowości w historii miasta*, ed. by Irena Lipman, Joanna Nowosielska-Sobel, Grzegorz Strauchold, Niemieckie Towarzystwo Kulturalno-Społeczne, Wrocław 2010, p. 59-67.

² Piotr Łukaszewicz, „Die Breslauer Akademie für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe unter dem Direktorat Hans Poelzigs“, in: Jerzy Ilkosz, Beate Störckuhl (eds.), *Hans Poelzig in Breslau. Architektur und Kunst 1900-1916*, Aschenbeck & Holstein, Delmenhorst 2000 (exh. cat.; Pol. version: Wrocław 2000), p. 33-50; Petra Hölscher, *Die Akademie für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe zu Breslau. Wege einer Kunsthochschule 1791-1932* (= Bau + Kunst. Schleswig-holsteinische Schriften zur Kunstgeschichte 5) Ludwig, Kiel 2003 (= PhD thesis Universität Kiel, 1997); Johanna Brade, *Werkstätten der Moderne. Lehrer und Schüler der Breslauer Akademie 1903-1932*. Stekovics, Halle/S. 2004 (exh. cat.).

³ Cf. Beate Störckuhl, „Hans Poelzig in Schlesien – Heimatstil als rhetorische Figur“, in Anita Aigner (ed.), *Vernakulare Moderne: Grenzüberschreitungen in der Architektur um 1900. Das Bauernhaus und seine Aneignung*, transcript Verlag, 2014, p. 181-205, here esp. 190-191.

⁴ E.g. Karl Schäfer, „Der Bildteppich in der Kunst der Gegenwart“, *Die Kunst. Monatshefte für freie und angewandte Kunst*, vol. 34 [= vol. 34 Angewandte Kunst of *Dekorative Kunst*, Jg. XIX] (1916), p. 63-71; *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, vol. 35 (1914-1915), p. 158-159 (2 illustrations of gobelins).

rediscovered for local art lovers by the Wrocław City Museum which held an exhibition focusing on his landscapes in spring 2015.⁵ Besides his paintings – landscapes, still life and portraits – the exhibition showed several designs by Wislicenus as well as examples of textile work based on his drawings conducted by Wanda Bibrowicz.

The Wrocław Art School was one of few schools at that time to admit women⁶; at the same time, the aim of most female students was to become drawing teachers. Some of them were also inclined to artistic crafts, as the state and society promoted the two directions of women's activity in the arts.⁷ Those who stuck to painting had no easy life, as one can see from press caricatures of “Malweiber” (painting women) or their short-lived careers interrupted by marriage.

Bibrowicz, too, passed her exams and received a teacher's diploma in 1898, but she has also continued to study painting. This early activity of hers has not been a subject of research yet, so one can come across but one reproduced picture of her, a small female nude in symbolist guise with a suited art nouveau frame. Studying under Wislicenus she often posed for his own work, one of these pictures being an altarpiece showing St. Barbara with Wanda's face, contemporarily published in a recapitulation of Wrocław artists' newest achievements in *Kunstgewerbeblatt*.⁸ Over time she became the closest fellow to her master, and in 1904, within the scope of the school reform, she officially took the position of his “technical assistant” in the textile workshops. Prior to this, she had already showed interest in the crafts, since the Royal Art School in Wrocław cooperated with the parallel School for

⁵ *Max Wislicenus. Malarz wrocławskiej secesji / Maler des Breslauer Jugendstils*, ed. by Maciej Łagiewski (exh. catalogue Muzeum Miejskie Wrocławia, 7.03. – 31.05.2015), Muzeum Miejskie Wrocławia, Wrocław 2015.

⁶ The usual possibility for women to study art were private institutions, mostly special women art schools and private courses. E.g. the Berlin Art Academy rejected women students between 1883 and 1919, when the state constitution of the Weimar Republic introduced equal status of women and men. Cf. Johanna Brade, “Die Frauen in den Künstlerkreisen des Riesengebirges (1900-1945). Ein Randthema? / Kobiety z karkonoskich kręgów artystycznych (1900-1945) – marginesowy temat?”, in *Die imposante Landschaft. Künstler und Künstlerkolonien im Riesengebirge im 20. Jahrhundert / Wspaniałe krajobrazy. Artyści i kolonie artystyczne w Karkonoszach w XX w.*, ed. by Klaus Bździach (exh. cat.), Jelenia Góra-Berlin 1999, p. 205-216, here 208f. see also Ksenia Brzezicka-Stanicka, *Artystki śląskie ok. 1880-1945*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2006.

⁷ Cf. Anne-Kathrin Herber, *Frauen an deutschen Kunstakademien im 20. Jahrhundert. Ausbildungsmöglichkeiten für Künstlerinnen ab 1919 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der süddeutschen Kunstakademien*, PhD thesis Heidelberg 2009, p. 45-46.

⁸ Conrad Buchwald, „Vom heutigen Kunsthandwerk in Schlesien: ein Brief aus Breslau“, *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, NF vol. 18 (1906-1907), no. 8, p. 149-161, here 152.

Artistic Crafts and the Artistic Craft Association (*Kunstgewerbeverein*).⁹ Bibrowicz practiced embroidery, as did Wislicenus' wife Else Freudenberg, Gertrud Daubert, Margarethe Trautwein, Agnes Fleischer and several other women studying at the School. Her screens embroidered with highly stylised floral ornaments after Henry van de Velde were much appreciated and, together with the work of other students, spread between local craftsmen as a means of influencing their artistic taste.¹⁰ She showed her embroideries at several joint exhibitions of the School: i.a. in 1902 at the Wrocław Museum of Crafts and two years later at a "model detached house" show organised by the local Crafts Association. The latter was regarded as a manifestation of the modern taste, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* of art nouveau.¹¹ However, only one of the women artists represented there, Margarethe Pfauth, showed her painted work – a fan.

Inspired by both Wislicenus' and Poelzig's ideas of the school reform, Wanda Bibrowicz eventually gave up painting. Instead, she learned the techniques of weaving by studying museum and private collections, reading literature and watching films devoted to this handicraft. She took courses in Berlin and Munich, and together with Wislicenus visited different textile workshops. However, their work was fully experimental. "We started the way the ancient Egyptians probably did", Wislicenus recalled later.¹² They tried it with raw materials, easy linear forms, few basic colours which made their attempts similar to those of "primitive" folk art. The workshops produced small items, mostly rugs, screens, cushion linen etc.¹³, and over time Bibrowicz developed a modern gobelin technique to execute Wislicenus' figural designs. She was responsible for training young women and the technical supervision

⁹ Both art schools as well as the Seminar for the Secondary Schools' Drawing Teachers were joined 1891 under the supervision of Dr. Hermann Kühn, cf. Maria Starzewska, „Zarys rozwoju śląskiego szkolnictwa w zakresie rzemiosł artystycznych (1791-1945), *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej* vol. 15 (1991), p. 13-37, here 18-20.

¹⁰ Ibidem; *Jahres-Bericht des Kunstgewerbevereins zu Breslau*, 1904, p. 207. For a reproduction of an embroidered screen by Bibrowicz's see C. Buchwald, „Vom heutigen Kunsthandwerk...“, p. 161 (here also examples of other women's embroidery work).

¹¹ Cf. Karl Masner, *Das Einfamilienhaus des Kunstgewerbevereins für Breslau und die Provinz Schlesien auf der Ausstellung für Handwerk und Kunstgewerbe in Breslau 1904*, Verlag von Ernst Wasmuth 1905; *Sonder-Ausstellung des Kunstgewerbevereins für Breslau und die Provinz Schlesien: Ausstellung für Handwerk und Kunstgewerbe*, Breslau 1904; as cit. by M. Starzewska, „Zarys rozwoju...“, p. 21-22. For more information on the artists' early exhibitions see also K. Brzezicka-Stanicka, *Artystki śląskie...*, p. 267.

¹² Max Wislicenus, *Aus seinen Erinnerungen*, 1954, manuscript from the collection of the Görlitz Museum, cit. after Anna Kania-Saj, „Max Wislicenus i jego rola w sztuce tkactwa dekoracyjnego / Max Wislicenus und seine Rolle in der Textilkunst“, in *Max Wislicenus...* (exh. cat.), p. 93-114, here p. 105.

¹³ Some of the cushion linen with floral motives and a tapestry with birds on a meadow were reproduced in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration: illustr. Monatshefte für moderne Malerei, Plastik, Architektur, Wohnungskunst u. künstlerisches Frauen-Arbeiten*, vol. 25 (1909-1910), p. 160.

of their work. Her students from this period had their own achievements, too. They were Frieda Körner (München), Alice Kalenbach (Köln), Berti Rosenberg (Berlin), Luise Nehmitz, Margarethe Ryschka, Henny Luniatschek, Grete Zeht and Else Jaskolla. The last one organised and ran a similar textile workshops in Nürnberg¹⁴ and in 1920 she became the first woman art professor at the Munich Academy.¹⁵

Wanda Bibrowicz actually led this pioneer textile class between 1904 and 1911, her ambition being to revive the traditional Silesian craft¹⁶ and elevate it to the heights of art. One of the first practitioners of this craft, she promoted – after her master Max Wislicenus – the approach of an “artist as a weaver and a weaver as an artist”. This contributed to the heyday of this branch of art in Wrocław, making the then-German school a part of the long-established Eastern (Polish) tradition of textile making. In spite of his respect for Wanda’s achievements and his progressive declarations regarding the art of crafts, Wislicenus never did the weaving by himself, keeping up the traditional division into a craftsman and a drawer (designer). Moreover, as already mentioned, this division coincided with sex-assigned roles in the society of that time. In effect, many established male artists used to draw complicated ornaments for textile works, leaving embroidery, lace making or weaving to women. The lasting prejudice against textile making as the female “house work” was reflected in the fact that women dominated this branch of art. The prejudice did not end after the Great War: the textile workshop at the Bauhaus was the only one led by a woman master. Although officially equal to her male colleagues and appreciated by many of them, Gunta Stölzl could not enjoy full respect of the art world even in the 1920s, and it was not until recently that the art history (and especially the art “herstory”) discovered her work.¹⁷

Max Wislicenus seemed to grant his partner artistic freedom, yet the contemporary art critics still underlined the professor’s artistic supervision of the workshop and his stylistic

¹⁴ E. M. Poradowska-Werszler, *W kręgu sztuki...*, p. 85. On Else Jaskolla’s class see e.g. Hans Karlinger, who refers also to the question of house work and „female craft“: „Else Jaskolla und ihre Fachklasse“, *Kunst und Handwerk: Zeitschrift für Kunstgewerbe und Kunsthandwerk seit 1851*, vol. 69 (1918-1919), p. 4-6.

¹⁵ Iska Jehl, Caroline Sternberg (eds.), *Erste Frauen in der Lehre. Akademie der Bildenden Künste und Kunstgewerbeschule München – Zur Entwicklung des Frauenanteils in der Lehre 1808-2014*, Akademie der Bildenden Künste München 2014 (Schriftenreihe der Akademie der Bildenden Künste München), p. 5, 20.

¹⁶ Cf. Adam Nahlik, *Z dziejów tkactwa na Dolnym Śląsku*, Wrocław 1978.

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. Trinity Connelley-Stanio, “Gender, Craft, and Industry: Polarization in the Bauhaus Weaving Workshop”, *Contrapposto*, vol. 3, 2014 [online: http://www.csuchico.edu/contrapposto/Volume_3_files/Papers/Connelley-StanioGenderCraft.pdf].

influence.¹⁸ It was also in his company that Bibrowicz's work was reproduced in art journals and showed at various public exhibitions in Germany or in private galleries. In 1907 their textile workshop was present at the School show in Wrocław and Berlin with their first bigger commission, a set of figural weavings designed by Wislicenus for the wedding room in the town house of Lwówek Śląski (Löwenberg).¹⁹ A short notice in *Cicerone* from 1910 reports on a joint exhibition of Wislicenus, his wife and Wanda Bibrowicz at the Ernst Arnold Gallery in Dresden. Wislicenus's work was represented there by a "special show of his paintings" and 3 additional rooms housing a collection of great decorative gobelins to be shown for the first time. The impressive weaving work "based on the professor's drawings and conducted by a class led by Miss Wanda Bibrowicz" was accompanied by some of her own smaller designs. But the true occasion was a chance to admire more of Else Wislicenus' "precious modern embroidery" work, seen and appreciated so far in Wien or Paris and not in Germany.²⁰ Even in this *menage á trois* constellation, the position of Wanda was clearly inferior to that of the professor's wife.

The collection of motifs used by Bibrowicz in her own early designs included mostly stylized animals and plants, some of them (like *The female stork / Bocianica*, 1904) recalling the aesthetics of Japonisme inherited from the art nouveau. Her compositions were very modest showing small animals, fish, birds, trees or flowers. They observed the specific needs and restrictions of the weaving craft, which made her work an anticipating fulfillment of Bauhaus' rules and distinguished it from the spectacular pieces drawn by Wislicenus. His projects²¹ resulted in a series of works of a painterly character, mostly with symbolic interpretations of long-haired women in trailing robes (*The night, The evening*, both 1907), nudes (*The pearl* – 1907, *Snake dance*), mythological figures (*The witch* – 1906, *Venus* –

¹⁸ C. Buchwald, „Vom heutigen Kunsthandwerk in Schlesien...“, p. 151. Still the author of the first monograph article on Bibrowicz, Karl Schaeffer, invoked the authority of Wislicenus when describing her independent work from Szklarska Poręba ("Bildwirkereien von Wanda Bibrowicz – Schreiberhau", *Die Kunst. Monatshefte für freie und angewandte Kunst*, vol. 34 [= vol. 34 Angewandte Kunst of *Dekorative Kunst*, Jg. XIX] (1916), p. 397-400).

¹⁹ Cf. Hans Poelzig, *Führer durch die Ausstellung von Arbeiten der Werkstätten der Königlichen Kunst- und Kunstgewerbeschule*, Berslau 1907; as cited by M. Starzewska, „Zarys rozwoju...“, p. 23. See also Piotr Łukaszewicz, „Lwówecka Sala Ślubów. Wczesne dzieło Hansa Poelziga oraz zespołu Akademii Sztuki i Rzemiosła Artystycznego“, *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, vol. 35 (1987), no. 4, p. 277-290.

²⁰ „Kunstaustellungen“, *Der Cicerone. Halbmonatsschrift für die Interessen des Kunstforschers & Sammlers*, vol. 2 (1910), no. 9, p. 321. However, Else Wislicenus' work appeared regularly at various shows and even received prizes. It was also reproduced in the exhibition reports and articles on applied art published in German art journals of the time.

²¹ Konrad Hahm, *Bildteppiche von Max Wislicenus*, Bruckmann, München [ca. 1940].

1910, *Diana* – 1913?) or historical scenes (wedding-tapestry for Lwówek Śląski, 1907, *Dance* for the government building in Wrocław, 1910/11) modelled on historic works of the court craft, the gobelins. Some of these works included an element that was inspired directly by Wanda, namely – the selection of colours. It was a feature that she developed later and that granted her recognition in the world of art, although at that time it was often ascribed to the evident painter's competence of Wislicenus. His designs were admired but also described as elitist artifacts and a precious alternative to fine art – highly decorative pictures of representational character. They were progressive in their flat composition, stylized ornaments and figures with art nouveau, folk or oriental flavour heading for art deco, but at the same time they fitted much more in a town hall or an art exhibition rather than in an average flat, especially the modern one. Besides the true enthusiasm for the revival of artistic crafts, the real social demand for work of that kind (or lack thereof) was an important subject of critical discussion.²²

Although in 1911 the Wrocław Art School received the status of Academy and in the meantime the joint work of both artists gained international appreciation,²³ Wanda Bibrowicz left her post and moved to a small town of Szklarska Poręba (German: Schreiberhau) in the Karkonosze Mountains (Giant Mountains) together with her mother, younger sister Helena and Grete Zeht, the latter two being also ex-students of the School.²⁴ The textile class had been taken over by Else Wislicenus who led it her until 1920. At the same time Wanda ran a successful private workshop and taught weaving to young women in Szklarska Poręba which was a lively artists' colony then. The milieu was created i.a. by poet Carl Hauptmann, a

²² K. Schaefer, „Der Bildteppich in der Kunst...“ The critic recalls also some preceding weaving activity in Germany and the reasons for their failure. Wislicenus' designs executed by Bibrowicz made a huge impression on him at the *Werkbundaustellung 1914* in Cologne (p. 67). Wanda's designs were also present on this exhibition, cf. her tapestry *St. Francis*, 1914, reproduced in: „Das Kunstgewerbe auf der Deutschen Werkbundaustellung in Köln“, *Die Kunst. Monatshefte für freie und angewandte Kunst*, vol. 32 [= vol. 32 *Angewandte Kunst* of *Dekorative Kunst*, Jg. XVIII] (1914-1915), p. 25-31, here p. 28 and Peter Jessen, „Die Deutsche Werkbund-Ausstellung Köln 1914“, *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes 1915*, fig. 39. On the demand for the artistic weaving work see also Felix Zimmermann, „Die Wandteppiche der Wanda Bibrowicz“, *Die Kunst*, vol. 42 [*Dekorative Kunst*, Jg. XXIII] (1920), p. 313-319.

²³ E.g. they both found access to a list of “designers for tapestries, embroideries and textile fabrics” published in *The Studio. Yearbook of Decorative Art 1909*, p. 80 (Bibrowicz – with a reproduction of her woven screen with a tree and antithetic cats), 97 (Wislicenus – with a fragment of the Löwenberg tapestry). The *Dance*-tapestry was shown in a great exhibition in Berlin 1911 (cf. *Katalog der Grossen Berliner Kunstausstellung*, Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft Berlin, Stuttgart, Leipzig 1911, p. 120: room 51, cat no. 2301).

²⁴ For the artistic and personal motives of her „escaping” Wrocław cf. Ksenia Stanicka-Brzezicka, „Die Fluchten von Wanda Bibrowicz. Die Weberin in Schreiberhau (Szklarska Poręba) 1911-1919”, in *Stadtfluchten – Ucieczki z miasta*, ed. by M. Omilanowska, B. Störkuhl, vol. VII *Das gemeinsame Kulturerbe – Wspólne dziedzictwo*, Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 2011, p. 201-210.

brother of the literary Nobel Prize winner Gerhard, and Hermann Hendrich, a landscape painter and the founder of the unique Hall of Fairy Tales (*Sagenhalle*). Given its artistic activities and promoted values, the colony was considered an important centre of local art, the so-called *Heimatkunst*, typical of the German revival at the beginning of the 20th century.²⁵

Heimatkunst was a conservative and progressive movement at the same time. The romantic *Heimat*-element was to transfer the old Nordic heritage preserved in local legends and folk artifacts into modern art and modern way of life. It was present in the fine arts and literature of the highest level as well as in architecture and applied art which followed traditional crafts of the region. Regarding its material, technique and iconography, the unpretentious work of Wanda Bibrowicz's workshop fitted perfectly in this milieu. It realised the well known principle of the *Hausfleiß* (house work) associated with women and could be socially accepted as their artistic occupation. Its context: female creative activity within the scope of the colony, has already been a subject of studies.²⁶ Several painters worked in the area around 1900, e.g. Gertrud Staats, Katharina Kosack, Herta Stock, Else Ury or Charlotte Pauly, but most of them came to the Karkonosze Mountains with their masters, lovers or husbands. Marriage was a serious obstacle for female artists wishing to develop their talents, thus numerous women had to realize their ambitions leading cultural salons and helping their famous partners. None of them joined local artistic associations, but they established two popular schools of lace making – one in Jelenia Góra (Hirschberg), active from 1904 to 1945, supervised by Marianne Siegert, and the other ran since 1906 by Margarethe Bardt and Hedwig Freiin von Dobeneck. This kind of work, the classic *Hausfleiß* suited them most.

Although much more modern, the rugs, bags, table cloths, cushions and toys created by the Bibrowicz sisters also appealed to a sphere of private creativity driven by everyday needs and the striving for aesthetic values accessible to every man. It was folk (popular) art as understood by the Austrian art historian Josef Strzygowski (i.e. art opposed to the art of the power and the institutions – *Machtkunst*) in its new form. Strzygowski traced and promoted the Nordic element in global arts and crafts which resulted i.a. from his investigation of the Viking architecture and ornaments, Slavic prechristian art, the crafts of nomadic people of Iran and Siberia and the early cultures of Asia (cf. the European japonisme ca. 1900). He

²⁵ More about the artists' colony in the exh. cat.: *Die imposante Landschaft...* and Agata Rome-Dzida, *Niemieccy artyści w Karkonoszach w latach 1880-1945. Przyczynek do badań nad Heimatkunst*, AD REM, Jelenia Góra 2013.

²⁶ J. Brade, "Die Frauen in den Künstlerkreisen..."

tended to classify the majority of folk art as “Nordic” and the reason why he did not do it with the Coptic textile fabrics that he catalogued in the Museum of Cairo was probably only because it was one of his earliest works.²⁷ Strzygowski himself was an educated weaver who inherited a textile factory in his native Bielsko-Biała in Poland, a border region with a mixed Polish-German population, similar to that in the Giant Mountains. He described the modern man and his sensibility to the arts by a weaver metaphor saying: ”The weaving loom at which we design our life does not stand anymore in a cottage beside the meadows of idyllic scenery; it became a machine and works in a deafening noise of the city and a breakneck haste.”²⁸ Although Strzygowski expressed no direct opinion on the colony or Bibrowicz’s work, his vision was in some way a summary of the ideas present in this milieu. He was the one who started the investigation of wooden architecture in South Poland, explaining it by Nordic influences. In 1927 he published a book devoted to this issue.²⁹ It must be mentioned here that as early as in the 1840s Silesia witnessed the moving of the original Viking church of Wang to Karpacz Górny (Brückenberg), which contributed to the heyday of the Nordic idea in the border regions. Some authors regarded its architecture as one of the sources of the Hall of Tales, and Strzygowski knew it well, too. Furthermore, the gobelin technique developed in Breslau was described by Wislicenus as “Nordic” and the weaving alone was strongly associated with the Scandinavian handicraft. Contemporary art critics compared the stylization of nature in Wanda’s work – her crows, falcons and roe deers – to those of the Norwegian Gerhard Munthe,³⁰ and some of them would immediately refer to the Scandinavian cottage whenever discussing the everyday use of these artifacts.

Bibrowicz’s poetic designs of plants and animals also had a strong symbolic content and made reference to old legends, mountain spirits or fairy tale creatures. The most popular of them was *Rübezahl* (Pol.: *Liczyrzepa*, Czech: *Krkonoš*), a character identified with the

²⁷ Josef Strzygowski favoured the spontaneous creativity of the people over the public art that was to serve the political needs of representation and propaganda. **It is not easy to have an overview of his work, though in English see esp.** “The Orient or the North”, *Eastern Art*, vol. 1 (1928), no. 2, p. 69-85; *Early church art in Northern Europe: with special reference to timber construction and decoration*, New York 1928. Also: „Ein Werk der Volkskunst im Lichte der Kunstforschung“, *Werke der Volkskunst mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Österreichs. Organ des K.K. Museum für österreichische Volkskunde in Wien*, vol. 1 (1913), no. 1, p. 8-9; *Der Norden in der Bildenden Kunst Westeuropas*, Wien 1926; *Die Altslavische Kunst. Ein Versuch ihres Nachweises*, Dr. Benno Filser, Augsburg 1929; *Altai-Iran und Volkerwanderung. Ziergeschichtliche Untersuchungen...*, J. C. Hinrich, Leipzig 1917, *Asiens bildende Kunst in Stichproben...*, Dr. Benno Filser, Augsburg 1930; Cf. J. Strzygowski, *Koptische Kunst*, Wien 1904.

²⁸ Josef Strzygowski, *Die Bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, Leipzig 1907, p. 97.

²⁹ Josef Strzygowski, *Die Holzkirchen in der Umgebung von Bielitz-Biala*, Posen 1927.

³⁰ K. Schaeffer, „Bildwirkereien...“, p. 398.

Nordic god Wotan which fascinated the artists of the Giant Mountains and became a symbol of the region. Carl Hauptmann wrote a book about this character (*Rübezahlbuch*, 1915) and Hermann Hendrich made a series of his own paintings retelling the legend in the Hall of Tales that was sometimes called Rübezahl's castle (*Rübezahlburg*). Bibrowicz also made a tapestry portraying this creature (1939, now lost) that personified the heritage of three nations: Germans, Poles and Czechs. Although the majority of inhabitants of the region were German at that time, the idea of a borderland *Heimat* mixed with some universal esoteric interests and a specific utopia of modern life within an artists' colony inhabited by people with different ethnic backgrounds.³¹ Bibrowicz, a Pole who sank into the German milieu and the mountain landscape of Silesia with its picturesque nature, recounted old local legends that can still be found inspiring on both sides of the border. Nowadays she is even considered by some Polish authors as a guardian of the forgotten Slavic faith with its gods, myths and motives cultivated by the neopagan rituals held around the Hall of Tales. Her *Woman with a basket* (1913) sitting in the forest with birds and animals is interpreted as the hypostasis of Mother Earth, the women's goddess Mokosh, *A black and a white crow* (1908) – as other deities, Chernobog and Belobog, some of landscapes (e.g. *Peace* and the vedutas from Ratzeburg) – as a portrayal of the ideal natural harmony in paradise.³²

In the course of time, Bibrowicz developed her style to include more complex figurative and narrative scenes with early art deco elements combined with a dreamy atmosphere. The best known independent compositions of hers created before the end of WW1 were *Christmas* (1912), *St. Francis* (1914, destroyed and copied by the author in 1926) and *St. Hieronymus* (1917), which were reproduced in art journals and showed at the most important exhibitions of German art,³³ as well as *Peace* (1916), in the collection of Carl

³¹ Both Wanda Bibrowicz and Max Wislicenus who often visited Szklarska Poręba are typical examples of the shared Polish-German heritage. Wislicenus himself came from a family whose name was derived from the town of Wiślica near Kraków. The family origins went back to the 16th century South Poland. See Wislicenus' genealogy and Wanda Bibrowicz-Wislicenus' text (from 17.7.1951) accompanying the jubilee exhibition of ca. 60 works by Wislicenus at the Bautzen (Budziszyn) Museum on the occasion of his 90th birthday, as cited online: http://www.wislicenus.info/max_wislicenus.htm.

³² Cf. the articles of Czesław Białczyński, [online] <https://bialczynski.wordpress.com/co-to-zastrony/klan/straznicy-wiary-slowianskiej-wiary-przyrodzonej/o-slaskiej-swiatyni-swiatla-swiatla-i-wiary-przyrodzonej-slowian-i-niemcow/wanda-bibrowicz-1878-1954-slaska-strazniczka-wiary-slowian/>. A "Slavic" artistic movement of the interbellum period was concentrated around Stanisław Szukalski (see Lechosław Lameński, *Stach z Warty Szukalski i Szczep Rogate Serce*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2007).

³³ See note 21. *St. Hieronymus*, now lost, was reproduced in F. Zimmermann, „Die Wandteppiche...“, p. 317.

Hauptmann.³⁴ According to Ewa Poradowicz-Werszler's catalogue, Bibrowicz designed and executed 34 tapestries of different size since the founding of the Wrocław workshop in 1904 until the end of her activity in Szklarska Poręba in 1919.³⁵ Among them there were 9 pieces that were to decorate the town hall in Ratzeburg. In appreciation of her earlier didactic work at the Art School and its continuation in Szklarska Poręba, Wanda received this important public commission thanks to Hans Poelzig who constructed the building. The realization of the project took several years. The 12 tapestries (1916-1922) that have survived in the town hall form a colourful textile frieze of 60 m² around the building's great sitting room. They show vedutas of 3 municipalities: Ratzeburg, Lauenburg and Mölln, several scenes from the medieval history of the region such as its Christianization, a courtly chase, some stylized human figures (a monk, a squire) as well as animal, plant and heraldry motives. These gobelins referred in some way to the *Dance tapestry* (now in National Museum in Wrocław), the first public commissioned work in Wrocław that was designed by Wislicenus and executed by Wanda. By contrast, Bibrowicz's own artistically independent propositions preserved the symbolic and dreamy atmosphere of a fairy tale that was typical of her work back in the Wrocław period.

After 1919, again under the influence of Wislicenus and Poelzig, she became involved in another major educational project. She and her family moved once again, this time to organize a state weaving workshop in Pillnitz near Dresden. She worked there together with Wislicenus until the workshop was eventually closed by the Hitler government in 1939. The attempts made by the couple to reactivate the workshop after WW 2 came to nothing. Nevertheless, the Pillnitz period was one of the most successful in Bibrowicz's career. Her work – now very well known in Germany and abroad – has been a subject of monograph articles and exhibited on various occasions. Bibrowicz's compositions of the Pillnitz period are mostly characterized by angular forms and much more daring colours. The art nouveau symbolism of her earlier works was enriched with exotic ideas and motifs, which resulted in creating a series of zodiac signs and images of oriental dancers, among others.

The originality of her composition, her achievements in reviving and reforming the craft combined with her strong position in the culture of the region make her work a significant phenomenon in Central European art at the beginning of the 20th century. Wanda

³⁴ The tapestry, now lost, is reproduced on the sites of the project devoted to Silesian collections of the past: <http://www.slaskiekolekcje.eu/Dziela/rzemioslo-artystyczne/Bibrowicz-Wanda-Pokoj>.

³⁵ E. M. Poradowska-Werszler, *W kręgu sztuki...*, p. 87-88.

Bibrowicz is the author of over a hundred works, 46 of which have survived World War 2 and now make part of several Polish and German public and private collections. Although she played an important role in educating new designers in Breslau and in Pillnitz, few specialists have heard of her work. I hope this paper can contribute somewhat to remembering this person and her very inspiring and valuable art.