

## **In harmony with nature. The art of balance.**

**Some examples of  
creative and artistic  
activities in the Low  
Beskids, which remain  
in relationship with the  
surrounding nature.**

*Information materials for eco-  
workshops in the project entitled:  
“Leave a trace of nature in your  
life”*





## Introduction:

Art and nature are inseparably intertwined in our region. Nature has been and continues to be both a source of inspiration and a means of survival for people. Nature has never been seen with indifference, because it has allowed us to develop and improve our understanding of the world. Our society today sees it as something we are not intrinsically connected to, so we allow the overexploitation of natural resources, just to satisfy our own needs.

However, the once important role of nature in the life and art of local residents and artists was much more complex:

1. Nature was the inspiration and the material:

Nature is not only an object of observation, but also a source of deep inspiration and an element with which artists establish a strong emotional bond.


2. It is a repository of valuable materials that guarantee survival in harsh conditions:

Nature has played a key role in survival by providing the necessary resources (food, building materials, medicines, etc.).

3. Understanding the ecological balance:

Sensitivity and curiosity about nature allow us to better understand the ecosystems and interactions between different elements of the natural environment, so we can find our place better.





## A visit to the open-air museum in Szymbark

### OUR GUIDE: AGNIESZKA BARSZCZ-BYLICA, HANDICRAFTS INSTRUCTOR

*We asked Ms. Agnieszka what forms of folk handicraft drew raw materials from nature, how plants were used and whether it is possible to find plant motifs inspired by nature in the folk art of people from Pogórze.*

Wickerwork developed primarily where it was easy to obtain raw material, i.e. wicker for basket weaving, for example: In the San River Valley or near Bobowa, on the Biała River. People engaged in weaving in backyard workshops. Here, almost everyone grew flax, while weaving looms were present in many cottages. People wove simple linen cloth, decorated with cross-stitch embroidery, and sometimes floral ornaments were printed with the use of forms.

There are few plant motifs in the decorative art of our region. Above the beds were hung tapestries with motifs of rural flowers from the garden: there were roses, violets, lilies, tulips... and sometimes also a stork. Gates, doors, shrines or sacred images: because in every house, in the chamber, there was a sacred area place decorated with simple flowers made of crepe paper. On window sills, red geraniums were planted in a pot for decoration, and myrtle – for luck. Myrtle was needed to weave wreaths that adorned the heads of nubile maidens. In the hallway of the cottage, herbs were often dried: yarrow for cleansing, mint for the stomach, spice herbs for cooking.





In order to prevent peeking through the windows, instead of using normal curtains, people hung café curtains in the form of cut-outs with nature or country life motifs: flowers, roosters, etc. Spiders made of straw and tissue paper were exceptionally decorative.

This traditional cottage decoration is known throughout Poland. In Pogórze, the most common decoration were radial straw mobiles. In the central place of the room, cords with strung decorations cut from tissue paper and interspersed with straws were radially attached to the ceiling. There was also another form of straw mobile — made of clay ball or potato. The spherical straw mobile was created by driving stalks of straw onto a potato, and then disks of tissue paper were put on each. This is a very time-consuming task, which is why straw mobiles were created for big occasions: Christmas, Easter and weddings. They were supposed to bring good luck and protect from evil.





A very interesting tradition passed down from generation to generation to this day remains carrying bouquets of flowers to the church to celebrate the day of Our Lady of the Herbs (Assumption of Mary) on August 15. The bouquets had to contain herbs, grains, fruits, as well as flowers from the backyard garden. Such a garden performed a function of a handy medicine cabinet as it included medicinal plants: dandelion like valerian had a calming effect on the nerves, soapwort foamed with water and could be used instead of soap, willowherbs could be fermented or drunk as an infusion, mugwort had a strengthening effect on the body, while hollyhock was used instead of paracetamol for all inflammation and pain.



Wild nature, the one behind the fence of the backyard garden, was not only a treasure trove of useful and necessary plants, but also a granary, especially in early spring. Winters used to be much longer. For example in March and April, when potatoes began to run out, soups were cooked from wild sorrel, nettle or ground elder. Today we say that it is a diet that cleanses the body.

About 50 years ago we stopped cultivating the knowledge of wild plants that our grandparents used on a daily basis. The traditional knowledge of the daily use of plants in folk culture disappeared with the enthusiasm for modernity in 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. We see that a generation gap has formed in our community. The knowledge of our grandparents was not passed on to our parents and only we, as grandchildren, appreciate its wisdom. We are looking for valuable and practical knowledge of rural herbalists, potters, coopers, wicker makers, weavers... but such people are almost no longer among us.



# A tale woven of linen



**OUR GUIDE: MR. JAN DZIUBYNA FROM  
"DZIUBYNIŁKA" LEMKO EDUCATIONAL  
HOMESTEAD IN GŁADYSZÓW**

*We asked Mr. Jan which plant was  
of particular importance for Lemko  
handicraft.*

In almost every Lemko village there was a carpenter, joiner, shoemaker, cooper, herbalist, blacksmith, and often a miller. Every self-respecting farmer had a granary. Instead of straw thatch, granaries often had plank roofs or were covered with fir or larch shingles. On the outside, they were often covered with clay to protect them from possible fire. There was no actual flooring on the ground, only an earthen floor. In winter, when the ground was freezing, the earthen floor rose a few centimetres. To stabilize this surface, clay was mixed with straw or chaff.



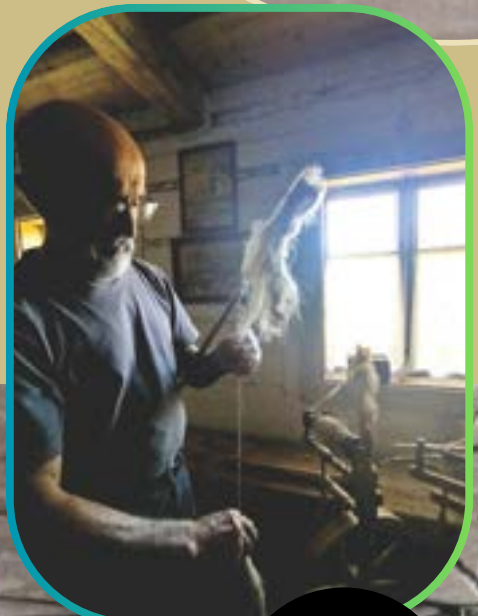


Flax was grown in every Lemko village. Lemko families planted cabbage, potatoes, broad beans, sowed grain and had a part of field where flax was grown. Flax stalks were used to make threads, and the seeds were used to press oil. There was one oil mill for every two or three villages. Flax is difficult to mow: its stalks are stiff and hard, so in the past it was not mowed, but pulled out with roots. The shoot from which the threads were later spun was longer in this case and harvesting the plants was easier. Flax seeds were separated and poured into mortars, where they were crushed, and then sieved. The sieved part of flax is valuable flax flour. Flax seed hulls, i.e. pomace, which remain after the separation of the flour, contain a lot of fibre and polysaccharides, so they were readily added to the feed for livestock. From flax flour the Lemkos obtained linseed oil using a thermo-mechanical process in a special oil mill. From 4 kg of flour, 1 l of oil could be pressed. The residue obtained after pressing the oil, a mass called press cake, contained more than 20% protein – the same as animal meat. Press cake was the meatless food richest in protein known in the 19th century in villages in the Lemko region.





And how were linen threads produced? Fibers were separated from the stalk with the use of a special tool called "miedlnica". Under the impact, the core of the dried flax stalk was crushed, leaving only flexible outer fibres. The fibres obtained in this way, crushed and shaken out, had to be combed on special combs with pins of different density, called "szczecina". After combing, the thread was spun. Some people did it on hand spindles, others on reels.



# Figures made of linden wood



## OUR GUIDE: MR. JAN ŚWIĘS – A FOLK CARVER

*We asked our guide what subjects he carves in wood*

**You are now carving a beautiful large bas-relief, what does it depict? Where do you get ideas from?**

The motifs are traditional: a flowering tree, a grape motif, a rodent, a squirrel...an angel, a snail, a hawk or a buzzard. One tree is blooming, another is fruiting.

I carve the openwork motifs on linden or poplar planks glued together, as this material is resistant to rain. I glue the right and left plank together so they do not curve. This plank I have here is freed from a very old tree with a diameter of over 140 cm.

I also carve statues. Here is a statue of the Sorrowful Christ made of linden wood, here is a robber dance, there is also a pieta, Madonnas, the holy family, angels...

and a musician playing the violin and St. Florian... every fire brigade in the area has a statue of the patron saint, St. Florian carved by me...

**You pay a lot of attention to the facial expressions of the carved figures...**

Facial expression is needed. I try to make every face a little different.





In Wysowa, there is my statue of an angel playing the cello, but I also often carved the motif of the devil Boruta, for example I carved Boruta with a fern flower... who was looking for his place in the world: in heaven they didn't want him, because he wasn't angelic enough, and in hell neither, because he wasn't diabolical enough.

**What other motives do you paint in wood?**

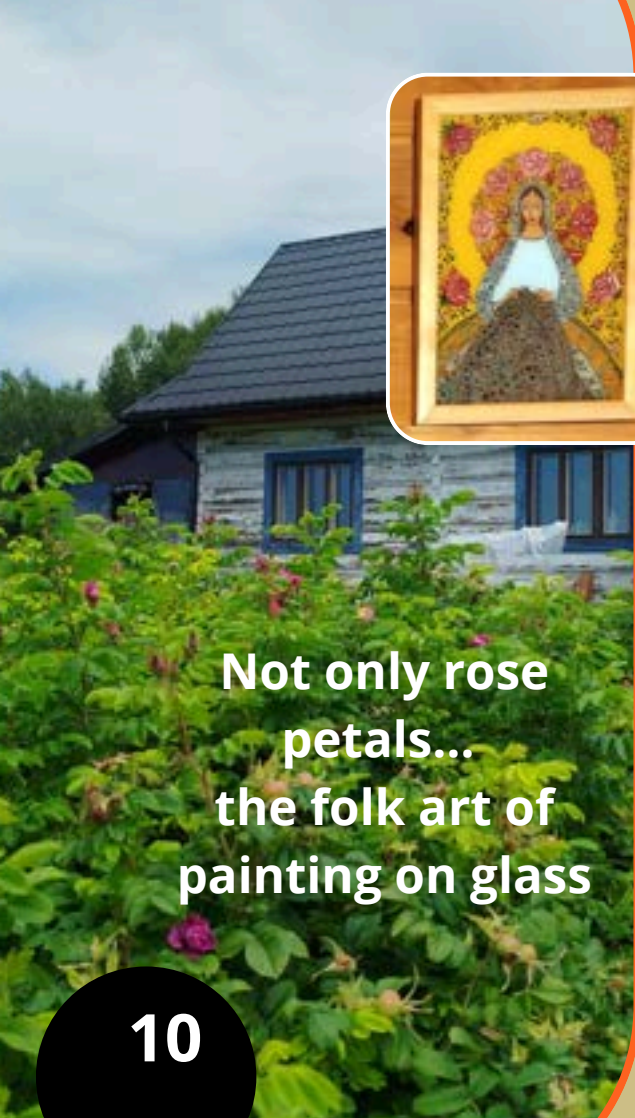
An owl motif is present in my work. The owl has a bad association in folk tradition: it's a predator, if it hoots somewhere, someone nearby will always die. You can't hear it because it flies silently and only casts a shadow. I spotted it at high noon, during the day, and well, I startled it. I was picking mushrooms and found it during the nap, and I got so close that it spread its wings. They say that when someone sees an owl, it is the last time they see anything in their life. I carved such an owl nesting eggs on human bones, on tibias.

I also made typical in this area pole shrines with a figure in the centre. There is a tradition here of erecting crosses with a so-called "zakole" (bent) instead of a roof. They are covered with shingles, I cover them with shingles myself. One such cross is in Nowica, one in Stawisza and one in Ropa, there are many of them. I am a carpenter by trade, and I make shingles the way they used to be, when they were split from a trunk. Fir stump was split all around the core, boards in the shape of a wedge are made this way. A special planer was used for this. They were made in the winter season. Those hand-split were sturdier than those made on a saw: there were no knots, no swirls. A hand-split shingle can last up to 100 years. They were made of fir or larch, resinous coniferous wood.

**The motif of a flowering tree often appears in your work.**

Yes, these are motifs that go back to my childhood, flowering trees appear in my work much more often than fruit trees.





**Not only rose petals...  
the folk art of painting on glass**



**OUR GUIDE: MS. MONIKA TEŚLUK - ARTIST AND ETHNOLOGIST**

*We asked Ms. Monika how nature is present in her artistic work and in her life.*

**How does nature inspire you?**

Nature inspires me to live, gives me a rhythm, and here in Nowica it is impossible to escape from this rhythm. There is so much going on in nature that we wait for winter to be able to rest. At the same time, without nature, we would not be able to survive this winter...The bond with nature cannot be created at once, it is the art of balance, constant observation and relationship that is built over the years. I have been building this relationship for 30 years.

In my garden there are only edible flowers. I don't know where my love for roses comes from. I always dreamed that there would be roses here and I could make something out of them. When the flowers of rose bushes appear, they can be classically ground with sugar in a mixing bowl: for donuts, for ice cream...just like our great-grandmothers and grandmothers did. From whole rose petals cooked in rose syrup we make jam, rose syrup and wine – we manage to enclose their flavour and colour in a bottle. We also have rose petal pesto with dried tomatoes and spices, for a sandwich or pasta, absolutely number one!

**What sets you apart is not only the culinary art inspired by your garden and the wild roses you have planted on the baulk and in the garden in front of your window. You are first of all an artist associated with the folk art of glass painting.**





I am an ethnologist by education, I have been very interested in glass painting since my studies and it has become my passion. In the past, I had organized exhibitions of this kind of art for many years and I taught glass painting classes. It is a technique that has its roots in folklore, although today the old rural areas are gone and only few true folk artists are still alive. People have always painted not only religious subjects, but also the surrounding nature... I paint exactly what I see outside my window. One of the main subjects of my paintings is an old hornbeam growing in the nearby forest, there are rose bushes, old fruit trees... I paint them in four seasons: summer, autumn, winter, spring. They are deeply rooted in the earth.

Once, paintings on glass were created in small painting manufactories near the pilgrimage centres, to which the rural people travelled. People were buying there paintings for their homes. Outside these centres, the folk artists, uneducated but with an inner imperative to paint, painted what they saw: so there were pictures of saints, but also other motifs from the world around them. Paints were often made from the simplest plant pigments, because the artists could not afford oil paints. Oil paints enhance the effect of depth, which the creators of paintings on glass aspired to. The paintings were hung under the ceiling, in such a way that light could enter from underneath, enhancing the effect of transparency. When I paint motifs from nature, I do not reproduce them, but I stylize them, I also take up such subjects as folk Madonnas, which are present in the consciousness of simple people and were often depicted doing everyday activities.



### **Are there any more nature inspirations in your life?**

My husband and I run a musical instrument studio in Zdynia. The Pan flute and other wonderful instruments with a beautiful sound can be made from our Beskid sycamore, wild cherry, bird cherry or knotweed.



## “Majsternia Karpat” is a smart living space



### AN INTERVIEW WITH ANNA CZUCHTA AND PIOTR JASION, FOUNDERS OF “MAJSTERNIA KARPAT” IN SĘKOWA.

**We are in Low Beskids. It is one of the few places in Europe where the connection between the traditional community and local nature still exists, and you can feel it in places like your “Majsternia”... What was the inspiration for creating this place?**

**Anna Czuchta:** In “Majsternia”, I focused on my heritage and traditions and culture of Lemkos. The Lemkos lived in a natural way. Here, nature was the material for architecture and design, as well as medicine and culinary arts. Everything here makes sense, every detail has its meaning and is not accidental. We focus on the authenticity and openness of this place. In a holistic approach, natural herbs had culinary, medicinal and utilitarian value: they were present in virtually every aspect of everyday life. In the past, tea was not known here and beverages were made mainly from mint, lime blossom or St. John's wort. However, people also used dandelion, pimpinella, asarabacca and many other herbs. Vegetable oils were pressed: From flax or St. John's wort. The most important herbs grew on the baulks. These herbs once grew where geese were grazed, but today they are disappearing from our landscape as a result of frequent mowing or changes in the way the land is cultivated. Here in “Majsternia” we cultivate the way of using herbs so that people can return to them. We make interesting compositions of tea blends with various additives to encourage people to consume natural beverages.

**Do you serve Lemko cuisine here?**

**Anna Czuchta:** Yes. We recreate old recipes and serve traditional dishes. We have published a Polish-Slovak cookbook about the cuisine of this region: in Poland we speak about Lemko dishes, while on the Slovak side of the mountains they are called Rusyn dishes. They often differ in name, sometimes in ingredients. The Lemko cuisine is primarily vegetarian. Meat was eaten only on special occasions. Dishes were made from what was on the farm: flour, groats, eggs, cream, cheese. People used a lot of mushrooms, pickles, for example pickled or marinated saffron milk caps are our speciality. In “Majsternia Karpat”, whose mission is to recreate and pass on local traditions, we organize educational workshops on weaving kilims with botanical motives or creating botanical salts, making natural infusions, herbal distillates, and even pressing plant oils.



Singing is an important element of our culture, which is why we also have singing workshops. People used to sing about the hardships of life, but also about the beauty of nature.

### **How are botanical salts created?**

It is a long process in which salts draw pigments from plants. For example: orange colour can be obtained by mixing flowers of marigold, tagetes, petals of cornflower, poppy, forsythia flowers.

### **What distinguishes the Lemko region from other places in the Polish Carpathians?**

**Piotr Jasion:** It is difficult to examine the heritage of the Low Beskids without nature. Nature and people are the two elements that allowed villages to be built here: these were villages founded on the Vlach law, which distinguishes this area of the Carpathians from others. The Vlachs brought here some principles of creating rural culture. The villages formed closed communities, each was independent and built its own economic spaces, and each had its own variation of language. The Lemkos' hut ("chyża") was adapted to the difficult mountain conditions: it had a high, broken roof so that "zachata", that is an additional wall made of planks, could be added. It is offset about half a metre from the main wall, but is still under the roof, thus it is protected from the wind and rain. It creates a corridor and storage space under the roof. There was a barn in the attic: straw and hay were stored here, while downstairs, on the ground floor, there was hallway with earthen floor. On one side of the hallway was the living area for people, only partially heated and often without a chimney, so-called "smoky shack", while on the other side – a stable and an animal barn. We want to preserve and pass on the natural and cultural heritage of our region. We operate within the framework of an association called Civitas Nostra, which carries out various projects. "Majsternia Karpac" is one of them.



Content, graphics, text, and photos:  
Agnieszka Oleszkiewicz, chlorofil.com.pl

We would like to thank the following co-authors:

Painting on Glass - Monika Teśluk  
Carpathian Master's Workshop  
Agnieszka Barszcz-Bylica  
Dziubyniłka - Łemko Educational Farm  
Dominika Bartkowska  
for providing J. Święs's sculptures



Dofinansowane przez  
Unię Europejską

2024-1-PL01-KA210-YOU-000254679

