

Bożena Seredyńska has gone down in the memory of the Wilanów staff as a first-class specialist in photography, a master in her art, who infected her co-workers with a passion for discovering unique artistic qualities in works of art and other museum pieces, and immortalising them in her works. She strove to maintain a proper work-life balance. She has devoted 37 years to culture. She spent the last years of her long and fruitful life with her family, sharing her love of culture with her loved ones and instilling this passion in younger generations. Even though several decades have passed since she left the Wilanów Museum, Bożena Seredyńska is still present there thanks to the Wilanów photographic library, which contains almost 30,000 of her photographs documenting the artefacts and the life of the institution. To this day, her works, which are of very high quality, are used in comparative analyses during ongoing conservation processes, in historical studies, and as documentation in museum files and in scholarly papers.

Bożena Seredyńska's photographic interests became apparent in adulthood.²

In 1955 she became a member of the Polish Photographic Society.³ It was an association of amateur photographers whose aim was to promote artistic photography, organise training courses and stage exhibitions. Bożena Seredyńska served as the Society's secretary (1959–1961) until its Warsaw branch of was transformed into the Warsaw Photographic Society,⁴ and later was an ordinary member of the WPS almost to the end of her professional career, taking part in collective and individual exhibitions presented in the exhibition hall at Śniadeckich Street in Warsaw.⁵ She has

COMMUNICATION

BOŻENA ANTONINA SEREDYŃSKA, 1925–2024 IN MEMORIAM¹

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at Wilanów*

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1 The text was written with the consent of Bożena Seredyńska's family on the basis of personal data in personnel file no. 658 held at the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów, recollections of fellow employees, documents from Bożena Seredyńska's home archive, and the account of her daughter Maria Morgulec.

2 Shortly after obtaining her high school diploma, she got married and devoted several years to raising her children; see B. Seredyńska, *Życiorys* [Curriculum vitae], manuscript, Personal documents, personnel file no. 658.

3 The Polish Photographic Society (1947–1961) was founded on the initiative of the Association of Polish Art Photographers to support amateur photographers. It was restructured in 1961, with each of the field branches becoming an autonomous institution. Bożena Seredyńska continued to be active in the Warsaw Photographic Society, affiliated to the Federation of Amateur Photographic Associations in Poland. The Federation printed the trade magazine *Obscura* (1982–1989) in Warsaw and had its own exhibition space at Śniadeckich St. in Warsaw. Members of the organisation took part in numerous national and international exhibitions, winning distinctions and awards. Some of its members were recommended for membership in the Association of Polish Art Photographers; see: Wacław Zdżarski, *Historia fotografii warszawskiej* (Warszawa, 1974), pp. 263–265.

4 Ibidem.

5 The Warsaw Photographic Society rented an exhibition hall from the Federation of Amateur Photographic Associations in Poland.



Fig. 1

Bożena Seredyńska,
ID photograph, Archives
of the Museum of King
Jan III's Palace at Wilanów



Fig. 2

The meeting of retired employees of the Wilanów Palace Museum, from the left: Maria Kwiecińska, Zofia Piwarska 'Teresa', Krystyna Gutowska-Dudek, Dr Wojciech Fijałkowski, Urszula Olizar-Leszczynska, unidentified person, Bożena Kędzieżawska, unidentified person, Bożena Seredyńska; 2012, private collection

also collaborated with artists affiliated with the Union of Polish Photographers and was active in its Scientific Photography Section. Its member Witold Dederko,⁶ himself a photographer and author of many books and manuals on the theory and practice of photography, became her professional mentor.

Bożena Seredyńska managed to turn her passion for photography into a profession. Her career developed slowly but steadily. In 1956, she started working at the National Museum in Warsaw as a laboratory technician. She confirmed her experience in 1962 by passing the exam at the Crafts Chamber in Warsaw and gaining the right to use the title of degree apprentice in the craft of photography.⁷ In 1966, she completed a one-year Higher Specialised Course in Technical and Specialist Photography run by the Crafts Training Institute in Warsaw.⁸ Her skills and photographic intuition, based on years of professional practice, led to her being entrusted with the task of organising a photographic studio at the Wilanów Museum in 1961, which she headed

6 Witold Dederko, photographer artist, teacher, author of many frequently reprinted works, such as *Elementy kompozycji fotograficznej* (Warszawa, 1960), updated edition *O kompozycji w fotografii* (Warszawa, 2017); *Oświetlenie w fotografii* (Warszawa, 1963, 1970, 1972), updated edition *Światło i cień w fotografii* (Warszawa, 2006, 2008, 2017).

7 Świadectwo czeladnicze [Certificate of apprenticeship] no. 50139 dated 15 March 1962, Personal documents, personnel file no. 658.

8 Świadectwo ukończenia kursu [Course completion certificate], Personal documents, personnel file no. 658.

until her retirement in 1988. She continued to work with the Museum until 1993 on a part-time basis.

The main objective of the studio set up by Bożena Seredyńska was to produce basic photographic documentation for the museum pieces that survived the Second World War, for most of which there was no visual documentation. In order to fully appreciate her work, it is important to note that in the post-war years, museums inventoried anew, selected and recorded their collections, often dispersed as a result of the war. Systematic photographic documentation by Bożena Seredyńska facilitated the management of the pieces and the identification of war losses.

Despite the difficulties in acquiring appropriate equipment and photographic materials, the Wilanów studio became known for photography at the highest level. Inadequate equipment and difficult working conditions required creativity and resourcefulness. Bożena Seredyńska overcame obstacles by means of methods that only she knew about (sometimes even professional secrets) in order to achieve the desired effects of concentration or diffusion of light. In the atelier, she constructed special tunnels to diffuse light, which enabled her to document, among others, the full spectrum of shades and colours of paintings, which are very difficult to capture in black and white, or to avoid reflections in the shiny surfaces of mirrors being photographed, as well as in polished gilt or silver surfaces. She used an interesting method of photographing glass involving special illumination of the object, producing almost graphic effects, thus bringing out the shape and material structure of transparent objects. She was particularly praised for these images. Today, similar effects can be achieved using ready-made specialised shadowless tents, light-diffusing umbrellas and professional flashes.

Jadwiga Mieleszko, senior curator at the Wilanów Museum, who was the head of the Scientific Documentation Department and the photographer's supervisor, emphasised that local and international publications have always valued Bożena Seredyńska's skills. These skills were the result of her constant work at raising her qualifications through the completion of relevant specialist courses and education in photography through professional literature.⁹

Her skills were also appreciated by curators at the Art Department. An employer opinion prepared by Irena Voisé, curator of the Early Art Gallery, stated:

Attaching importance to reproducing the appearance of individual pieces as accurately as possible, Bożena Seredyńska has become a specialist in, in particular, photographing works of artistic craftsmanship, bringing out not only the richness of the shapes of the

⁹ Jadwiga Mieleszko, *Opinia o pracy Bożeny Seredyńskiej* [Appraisal of Bożena Seredyńska's work] (14 January 1983), Personal documents, personnel file no. 658.



Fig. 3

A goblet with cover photographed by Bożena Seredyńska, Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów



Fig. 4

Konstanty Sobieski's case bottle photographed by Bożena Sereżyńska, Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów



Fig. 5

A jug photographed by Bożena Seredyńska, Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów

objects photographed, but also their meticulous processing and the material from which they are made. For her photographs of glass, porcelain, silverware, bronzes, textiles and furniture, objects that are particularly difficult to photograph, she was repeatedly showered with words of highest praise by editors of publications that printed studies on the Wilanów collections.¹⁰

Anna Kwiatkowska, senior curator at the Museum of King John III's Palace in Wilanów, recalls that Bożena Seredyńska would begin the process of photographing a piece with its thorough analysis, almost as if trying to get a feel for the structure and matter of the object at hand. In view of the limited access to high-quality photographic material, she often had to contain all the information about the piece, including not only its shape, but also the texture and the material that gave specific visual effects on its surface, in a single photograph. She had an extraordinary photographic intuition, and a feel for working with light. She strove for perfection in rendering the features of artefacts, thus supporting the work of curators in the Art Department. She was able to perfectly render problematic, damaged or degraded fragments of the works, justifying the validity of conservation procedures through her photographs.

The Wilanów conservators expressed a similar opinion of Bożena Seredyńska's photographs:

The variety of artefacts in terms of materials, forms and sizes (paintings with different substrates, furniture, ceramics, glass, wall paintings, etc.) does not affect the quality of the photographs, all the works are done very well, with great sensitivity and individual approach to each object. Thanks to Bożena Seredyńska's extensive experience and constantly improving professional qualifications, the photographic documentation of our studio is legible, presenting a clear picture of the work being done and the need for the procedures which were applied. The quality of the photographic documentation presented at conservation commissions was always highly praised.¹¹

Bożena Seredyńska carried out commissions from the Museum, as well as from other institutions, universities and private art collectors. Her professional photographs found their way into exhibition catalogues

10 Irena Voisé, *Opinia Działu Sztuki o kwalifikacjach Bożeny Seredyńskiej, zatrudnionej w Pracowni Fotograficznej Muzeum w Wilanowie* [Art Department's appraisal of the qualifications of Bożena Seredyńska, employed at the Photographic Studio of the Wilanów Museum], Personal documents, personnel file no. 658.

11 Maria Chelkowska, *Opinia o pracowniku Bożenie Seredyńskiej* [Appraisal of the employee Bożena Seredyńska], 17 January 1983, Personal documents, personnel file no. 658.

and studies published by PWN, Ossolineum, and the Auriga publishing house.¹²

Bożena Sereżyńska was ready to share her photographic skills and her particular way of looking at art. Between 1970 and 1972, she taught documentary photography at the Faculty of Conservation of Works of Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. As highlighted by Prof. Juliusz Bursze,¹³ the then dean of the Faculty, Bożena Sereżyńska showed a lot of initiative and interest in her teaching, ensuring a very high level of documentary photography despite the difficulties with finding space for her course.¹⁴

Between 1967 and 1974, she established cooperation with the Association of Polish Art Photographers (ZPAF), including its Scientific Photography Section, which resulted in her participation in the Fourth Symposium on Scientific Photography organised by the Association and an accompanying exhibition presenting photographic documentation in the conservation of easel paintings. She was also one of the speakers at the symposium. Since 1977 she also belonged to the Society of Authors (ZAiKS).¹⁵

She took her work very seriously. Working as a senior craftsman in the field of photography, she fought for documentary photography to be recognised as a fully-fledged artistic discipline requiring special skills and creativity. It was a point of honour for her to obtain the right to sign photographs of museum pieces she documented with her name, as original photographic works. Her efforts came into fruition in 1980 when she obtained a certificate from the Ministry of Culture and Art stating that she worked in the profession of a photographer artist. The works submitted at the time before the Qualification Commission of the Ministry of Culture and Art were highly rated. Recognition of her artistry came in the form of a solo exhibition titled 'Dzieła sztuki w obiektywie' [Works of art in a lens], which took place in 1984 at the Warsaw Photographic Society building at 10 Śniadeckich St. in Warsaw. This exhibition was reprised in

12 Elżbieta Skrzypczak, secretary of the publishing house, Zaświadczenie o współpracy [Certificate of cooperation], Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 17 December 1980; Teresa Hrankowska, Zaświadczenie o wykonaniu dzieła [Certificate of task completion], PWN, 22 November 1980; Dr Wojciech Fijałkowski, curator at the Wilanów Museum, Opinia o pracy p. Bożeny Sereżyńskiej [Appraisal of Mrs Bożena Sereżyńska's work], 7 May 1984, documents in Bożena Sereżyńska's home archive.

13 Prof. Juliusz Bursze was Deputy Rector (1975–1978) and Rector (1982–1984) of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, from 1983 to 1986 Director of the National Museum in Warsaw; wkirds.asp.waw.pl/historia/ (accessed 20 February 2025).

14 Juliusz Bursze, Opinia [Appraisal], 19 December 1972, Personal documents, personnel file no. 658.

15 The Society of Authors ZAiKS membership card, photocopy, Personal documents, personnel file no. 658. Wspomnienie Bożeny Sereżyńskiej [In Memoriam], zaiks.org.pl/artykuly/2025/styczen/bozena-seredyńska (accessed 4 March 2025).



Fig. 6

Bożena Seredyńska is decorated with the Cross of Independence by Presidential Secretary of State Andrzej Dera, Presidential Palace, 26 September 2018.

1994 at the Regional Public Library in Radom. Today, all her photographs in the Wilanów archive have stickers with information about the author.

Bożena Seredyńska is remembered as a highly cultured and warm person with a great sense of humour. Even in her old age, she infected her colleagues with her energy, resourcefulness and a passion for art. She shared her extensive knowledge and professional perception of a museum artefact while remaining humble and helpful. Without her work, Wilanów would not have reached the level in publishing, documentation and exhibition matters for which it has been known over the years and now is proud to continue.

Educational activity:

1970–1972 – Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Faculty of Conservation of Works of Art, teaching courses in specialist photography.

Participation in exhibitions:

1970 – Participation in the exhibition ‘XXV lat Warszawy’ [25 years of Warsaw], organised by the Warsaw Photographic Society in the exhibition hall at 10 Śniadeckich St. in Warsaw.¹⁶

1974 – participation in an exhibition accompanying the Sixth Symposium of Scientific Photography organised by the Scientific Photography Section of the Association of Polish Art Photographers – presentation of photographs from the conservation of easel paintings combined with a lecture, Jodłowy Dwór in Święty Krzyż near Kielce.

16 B. Seredyńska, *Życiorys* [Curriculum vitae], manuscript, Personal documents, personnel file no. 658. Cf. Wacław Żdżarski, *Historia warszawskiej fotografii* (Warszawa, 1974).

1984 – solo exhibition ‘Dzieła sztuki w obiektywie’ [Works of art in a lens] organised by the Warsaw Photographic Society in the exhibition hall at 10 Śniadeckich St. in Warsaw.

1994 – solo exhibition ‘Dzieła sztuki w obiektywie’ [Works of art in a lens], reprise, Regional Public Library in Radom, 12 Piłsudskiego St.

Medals and awards:

1977 – ‘Meritorious Cultural Activist’ Badge, conferred by the Minister of Culture and Art

1987 – ‘For the Care of Monuments’ Golden Badge

1987 – The Knight’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta

2018 – The Cross of Independence, conferred by the President of Poland

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- p. 528 Bożena Seredyńska, ID photograph, Archives of the Museum of King Jan III’s Palace at Wilanów
- p. 529 The meeting of retired employees of the Wilanów Palace Museum, from the left: Maria Kwiecińska, Zofia Piwarska ‘Teresa’, Krystyna Gutowska-Dudek, Dr Wojciech Fijałkowski, Urszula Olizar-Leszczyńska, unidentified person, Bożena Kędziejawska, unidentified person, Bożena Seredyńska; 2012, private collection
- p. 531 A goblet with cover photographed by Bożena Seredyńska, Museum of King Jan III’s Palace at Wilanów
- p. 532 Konstanty Sobieski’s case bottle photographed by Bożena Seredyńska, Museum of King Jan III’s Palace at Wilanów
- p. 533 A jug photographed by Bożena Seredyńska, Museum of King Jan III’s Palace at Wilanów
- p. 536 Bożena Seredyńska is decorated with the Cross of Independence by Presidential Secretary of State Andrzej Dera, Presidential Palace, 26 September 2018, from family archives

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Various documents, Bożena Seredyńska’s home archive, unpaginated.

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