

# “In the Shadow. Traces of Bronisław Piłsudski”

**Municipal Museum in Żory | 12 December 2025 – 22 February 2026**

**Organiser: the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław**

*In the Shadow. Traces of Bronisław Piłsudski* was an interdisciplinary exhibition that combined contemporary art, anthropological reflection, and archival research. It was presented at the Municipal Museum in Żory as part of a broader artistic and research project developed in cooperation with the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław. The exhibition was curated by Anna Kołodziejczyk and Daniela Tagowska, and its scenography was prepared by Marta Płonka and Mieczysław Piróg. From the beginning, the project was conceived not as a historical reconstruction, but as a contemporary reflection on the legacy of Bronisław Piłsudski and on the problem of representing Ainu culture today.

Bronisław Piłsudski was an ethnographer and researcher whose work on the Ainu remains a major documentary record of their culture. He collected songs, stories, descriptions of rituals, creating a unique archive of historical value. His achievements remained for many years insufficiently recognised in Poland. The exhibition therefore attempted not only to recall his figure, but also to ask how his archive could be read in the present and how it could become a point of dialogue between the past and contemporary artistic practice.

An important role in shaping the project was played by research visits to the Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park in Shiraoi, Hokkaido, carried out in 2022 and 2024. These visits gave the team direct contact with Ainu heritage and became a turning point in their method of work. The project developed in two stages: first as a research impulse, and then as a verification of methods and of the language of representation. This process was especially important because it allowed the curators and artists to work with greater awareness of the ethics of sources and to avoid exoticising interpretations.

The title *In the Shadow* referred to invisibility, silence, and the difficulty of translating knowledge between archive and contemporary experience. It

also suggested the shadow in which Piłsudski's legacy had remained for years, as well as the broader tension between documentation and responsible representation. The exhibition did not offer simple answers. Instead, it invited viewers to move through a space of attention, fragility, and reflection. It asked how one could speak today about culture, memory, and loss without reducing them to a closed narrative.

The project was described as being built “close to the archive.” This expression captured its core approach. Rather than treating the archive as a static collection of facts, the exhibition approached it as a living field of relations, questions, and responsibilities. Contemporary art served here not as decoration, but as a tool of inquiry. It helped shift the emphasis from speaking about Others toward creating a more careful relationship with material, trace, and memory.

Żory became the opening site of the exhibition because the Municipal Museum in Żory offered unique resources and expertise connected with Ainu heritage and the Piłsudski context. The preparatory stage also included a symposium held on 6 March 2025 at the Ethnographic Museum in Wrocław. This event introduced the historical background, sources, and the language of the planned exhibition, showing that the project was not only an exhibition, but also a platform of dialogue between museum practice, academic research, and contemporary art.

For the Polish community on Hokkaido, the exhibition carried particular meaning. It recalled a Polish figure whose work became deeply connected with the cultural history of Hokkaido, while also showing that this connection required humility, responsibility, and dialogue. *In the Shadow. Traces of Bronisław Piłsudski* did not monumentalise its subject. Instead, it opened a space for thoughtful encounter and for a more ethical way of working with memory, archive, and cultural heritage.

(Daniela Tagowska, ass. tutor, Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław)