

## 7: A Picnic by the Vistula River

The vast majority of Warsaw residents were unable to take longer vacations away from the city. Nevertheless, less affluent inhabitants commonly took advantage of the available opportunities for a short respite in nature. They tried to emulate the higher social circles for whom spending leisure time outside Warsaw was a way of life. Bielany, in particular, was very popular among Warsaw residents. Stanisław August Poniatowski initiated the tradition of celebratory Pentecost festivities at the Camaldolese Monastery in the Bielański Forest. Events included competitions, performances, concerts, feasts, and illuminations. The royal court was accompanied by aristocrats, landowners, and wealthy burghers. The common people who arrived in large numbers watched the elite's entertainment and enjoyed attractions prepared especially for them. People of all social classes enjoyed the festivities side by side.

The popularity of picnics in Bielany lasted throughout the 19th century but, over time, the fair took on a distinctly folk character. On Pentecost Sunday, tens of thousands of Warsaw residents arrived at the forest by boats on the Vistula River, by omnibuses, carriages, or on foot. The main attractions of the Bielany festival were feasts, choral singing, dance parties, the Ferris Wheel, carousels, puppet theaters, magician shows, and shooting ranges. People ate food they had brought with them or purchased on-site, such as tripe, pea soup, and hot sausage. Beer tents were very popular. Often, people would get into brawls that required police intervention. The Bielany picnic is depicted in, among other things, Franciszek Kostrzewski's work from 1900, presented at the exhibition, and also in the photographs by Henryk Poddębni from a later period.

Saska Kępa also had a rich tradition as a leisure spot. Starting in 1735, King Augustus III Sas organized festivals and holiday celebrations there. By the turn of the 20th century, Saska Kępa became a favorite picnic spot for the less affluent segment of the society. Visitors enjoyed local snacks, music, dancing, and lively performances. Popular drinking spots included establishments like "Prado," "Pod Kotwicą," and "Pod Dębem." The proximity to the river offered opportunities for bathing, and regular steamboat services transported people to the opposite bank from the start of the May

season. Just like in Bielany, picnics in Saska Kępa were characterised by a high degree of moral freedom.

In the second half of the 19th century, the custom of having communal meals outdoors in the spring and summer was established. In Warsaw, various leisure spots developed for different social groups. The working class celebrated in Młynów, in the gardens in the area of Czyste, and in the Pole Mokotowskie park; the wealthier strata preferred Saska Kępa and suburban locations. They brought provisions such as roasted meats, bread, and fruits from home, and bought pretzels, doughnuts, sausages, or sandwiches from street vendors. Konrad Brandel captured picnic scenes in Warsaw at the end of the 19th century in his photographs, depicting members and supporters of the Warsaw Rowing Society relaxing in gardens of Saska Kępa, or labourers in Młynów. Although more and more city residents would eat outdoors, for the wealthy elite, eating outside without a proper setting was considered unacceptable.

During the interwar period, picnicking remained popular for health reasons. Doctors recommended spending time outdoors, taking water and sun baths to boost vitality. The picnic spots expanded to include beaches along the Vistula River.

After World War II, the tradition of individual picnicking partially declined. Instead, authorities encouraged residents to participate in communal festivals as part of state celebrations, such as 1 May and 22 July. The festival menu included roasted sausages or blood sausage, sometimes soups, ice cream, and cotton candy. Sunday picnics became popular, and with the introduction of free Saturdays, picnicking on Saturdays also became common in suburban areas.

Today, picnicking is making a comeback, and new forms of it are emerging. Popular forms of outdoor relaxation that include eating are: barbecuing by the Vistula River or Czerniakowskie Lake, having picnics in parks, and spending time in beer gardens along the Vistula boulevards. Breakfast markets organized in Żoliborz or Mokotów, as well as other outdoor events combined with tasting new flavours and dishes, have become new ways to spend leisure time in the city.

This section of the exhibition, which also marks the conclusion of the entire exhibition, ends with contemporary works by female artists.

In her photo reportage *Warsaw Beach* from last year, from which a selection of photos is presented in the exhibition, Anna Bedyńska captures how Warsaw residents spend their leisure time by the Vistula River. Like an anthropologist or sociologist, she highlights the preferences to eat outdoors, different types of grilled foods, and picnic accessories. Warsaw beaches are democratic and accessible to everyone, which inspired the author's sociological and anthropological observations—and for us, culinary ones as well. Grilling and sharing meals and snacks have long been integral to beach outings. These practices reveal differences in diets, serving methods, and eating habits. Some people grill meat, others grill vegetables; some bring prepared sandwiches and fruits. Some pack their picnic provisions in picnic baskets with dishes and cutlery, others use aluminum trays and plastic cups. There are even those who elegantly set up tables for their meals.

In this section, we bring installation by Bettina Bereś, titled *The Reception outdoors*, thus transforming it into a garden table. The work is a reference to the family history of her mother and mother's brother from childhood—one evening, the siblings sneaked into an empty room with a table set for a reception and began to feast on the elaborate dishes served on it. With a touch of irony, the artist evokes this memory through pickled porcini mushrooms, “nothing” soup, and mayonnaise herring, embroidering their names onto the tablecloth.